Whispering Wires

By HENRY LEVERAGE

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WHISPERING WIRES

WHISPERING WIRES

ADAPTED FROM THE *SATURDAY EVENING POST* STORY
OF THE SAME TITLE

BY

HENRY LEVERAGE

NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD AND COMPANY
1918

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NEW YORK

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TO

ONE WHO HELPED

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WHISPERING WIRES

CHAPTER ONE

"THE WHISPERING VOICE"

IN the greatest city of the modern world, in the Metropolis of Guilt and Guile—where Alias and Alibi ride in gum-shod limousines while Mary Smith of the pure heart walks the pavements with broken shoes—there is a mansion so rich and so rare that it stands alone.

Turret and tower, green-bronze roof, Carrara-marbled portico and iron-grilled gates brought from Hyderabad, have made this mansion the show place and the Peri's paradise for those who parade the Avenue called Fifth, in an unending sash of fashion.

Out from this palace at the close of a winter's day, there flashed the tiny pulsations of voice-induced currents of electricity which reached the telephone-central, were plugged upon the proper underground paper-insulated wires and entered, even as the voice was speaking, the cloud-hung office of Detective Drew.

Triggy Drew, as he was called, was dark, stout and forty-one years of age to a month. He crooked his elbow, removed his cigar and pressed the telephone-receiver to his ear.

The voice that came over the whispering wires was as clear as a bell within a bell. It said:

"Montgomery Stockbridge wants you."

Drew hung up the telephone-receiver. He replaced the cigar in his mouth. He wheeled in his chair and pressed a buzzer. To the operative who entered he said:

"Delaney, watch things while I'm gone. I'm called up-town!"

The operative reached and handed Drew his coat. He took the swivel-chair before the desk, as his chief clapped on a hat, turned his eyes toward the ground-glass door, and passed out with a brisk stride.

"It's a big case," said Delaney leaning back. "Triggy is on somebody's trail. Maybe German—maybe not!"

Drew nodded to the waiting operatives in the outer room of the suite. He swung into the hallway with his brown eyes glowing like a man who walked out of realism into romance.

The elevator plumbed eighteen stories. The corridor was clear. A taxi stood at the curb. Into this Drew stepped, gave the address and was gently seated as the driver released his

brake, set the meter, and dropped through first, second and into third speed.

Past Wall Street the taxi flashed. It rounded toward the Bowery, which showed that the driver knew his map. It struck up through the car tracks, across to Washington Park and there took the long longitude of Fifth Avenue as the shortest and quickest way up-town.

Drew had no eye for the passers-by. He was repeating two words over and over like a novice counting the same beads. Montgomery Stockbridge was a name to conjure with in the Bagdad of Seven Million. He had made many enemies and much money. His wealth ran well above seven figures.

The taxi came to a gliding halt. Drew stepped out in front of a church. He tossed the driver two one-dollar bills and some silver. He waited as the taxi merged in the traffic. He turned and glanced keenly up and down the Avenue. Then he hurried north for one square, paused before the mansion of turrets and towers, and pressed a button which was set in the doorway.

The door opened to a crack, then wide. A butler barred the way. To him Drew said, "Mr. Stockbridge sent for me."

The butler bowed with old world civility. He took the detective's hat and coat. He waited until Drew removed his gloves. He bowed for a second time and led the way over rugs

whose pile was as thick as some Persian temple's. They came finally, after an aisle of old masters, to the inner circle of latter-day finance and money-wizardry—the celebrated library of Montgomery Stockbridge.

The Munition Magnate sat there. He turned as the butler announced the detective. He shot a gray-thatched pair of eyes up and over a mahogany table upon which a white envelope lay. He smiled coldly. His thumb jerked toward a leather chair into which Drew sank and leaned his elbows upon the table.

Stockbridge coughed dryly. He blinked and studied the detective's face for a long minute. He glanced from the envelope up at a cone of rose light which hung from a cluster of electric-globes. His expression, seen in this light, was like an aged lion brought to bay. His wrinkled skin was tawny. His hands coiled and uncoiled like claws. They moved prehensily, as though cobwebs were in that perfumed air of wealth and security. They poised over the envelope as if to snatch the secret or delusion hidden there.

"See that letter!" declared the Munition Magnate, closing his fist and banging the table. "See it? D'ye see it?"

Drew widened his eyes at the outburst. He crossed his legs and nodded.

"It's blackmail!" Stockbridge snarled.

"Rank-scented blackmail of the cheapest order."

"A threat of some kind?"

"Threat? Yes—a threat, in a way. It's clever, but it won't *work* with me!"

Drew recrossed his legs. He touched his short-cropped mustache with the fingers of his right hand. He coughed as in suggestion. His brows lifted as he studied the envelope from a distance.

Stockbridge snatched it up suddenly. He slapped it against the edge of the polished table. He turned and found a cigar to his liking out of many in a humidor beneath a smaller table at the right of his chair. He bit on this cigar, struck a match, and dragged in the smoke with deep inhalings before he turned and opened the envelope, exposing a letter which he rapped with the knuckles of his left hand.

"I'll beg to be excused," he said half-apologetically. "I'm not myself. This letter, you know. I want you to ferret it out. I want you to find out who sent it, and make him or her pay. Make them pay in full!"

"May I see it?"

Stockbridge hesitated. His eyes ran across the paper. His lips curled in an ugly, thin-visaged smile which wrinkled his yellow face. "See it? Yes!" he snapped, volplaning the

sheet across the table with a vicious jerk of his wrist.

"Ridgewood Cemetery," said Drew lifting the letter. "Heading, Ridgewood Cemetery," he repeated softly. "Dated yesterday," he added with a sly glance at Stockbridge. "Signed by the superintendent, I suppose. Yes, by the superintendent. He scrawls worse than I do. Well, it looks official and smells—ah!"

Stockbridge worked his brows up and down like a gorilla. He chewed on his cigar with savage grinding of gold-filled teeth.

"Smells graveyardy," continued Drew. "I get flowers and urns and new-turned earth. This seems to be the bare announcement that the grave you ordered dug in the family plot—is ready and waiting." Drew glanced up.

"Quite so," sneered the Magnate.

Drew stroked his upper lip. He turned the letter over. He held it to the rose-light and studied the water-mark. He raised his black brows and said sepulchrally:

"Who is dead?"

Stockbridge stiffened. "Dead?" he exclaimed. "Why, nobody is dead! Damn it, Drew, there's nobody dead at all!"

The detective frowned. "Somebody in the immediate family?" he questioned. "Somebody you are expecting to pass away soon? Some one on their sick-bed, for instance?"

Stockbridge snatched the cigar from his mouth and threw it to the rug. "That letter's a stab, Drew!" he exclaimed. "It's a damn insult to me and mine, if you want to know. I'll have the author of it, or know the reason why. I'll spend fifty thousand to catch the miscreants. They'll not monkey with me!"

"The writer of this seems to be the superintendent."

"Yes—that part's all right. He knows nothing save what you see there. This threat concerns Loris and I. We are the only two who will ever be buried in our family plot."

"What does she know? Has she seen this letter?"

"Yes!"

"Knows nothing about it?"

"Nothing."

"Has no enemies?"

"Certainly not! She's just a girl!" The Magnate's eyes softened slightly. He glanced around for a cigar.

Drew laid the letter on the table. "It seems to me," he said, "that you have not explained everything. When did you get this letter, Mr. Stockbridge? What time did it arrive?"

"It came in the late mail last night. I showed it to Loris at supper. Then I called up the cemetery people this morning. Got the superintendent. He said that 'Dr. Conroy'—our

family physician—'had phoned him and ordered the grave dug.' Said, 'A death was about to occur in the Stockbridge family.' Conroy never sent any such message!"

"Umph!" broke in Drew.

"Yes! He assured me of it. Was terribly put out!"

"It seems to me," said Drew, "that the entire matter is a practical joke of the low order. I see nothing else to it—so far. It isn't even clever."

"I'm not so sure," Stockbridge said huskily. "It may be *very* clever. It may mean that death is coming—to me or to Loris. There's men in this city who are capable of anything!"

The break in the Magnate's voice brought Drew to the edge of his chair.

"Whom do you suspect?" he asked professionally. "Motive goes before crime—you know. Sometimes a warning is sent—more often there is none. Clever men do not telegraph a blow."

"I suspect the whole city!" declared Stockbridge.

Drew smiled sincerely. It was plainly evident that the Magnate was suffering from the thrust about Loris and the graveyard. The detective had never seen him so unsettled.

"How about Germans?" he asked. "You've made a lot of ammunition—haven't you?"

"Ye—s. I've still holdings in Standard Shell, Preferred, and Amalgamated Powder. Also, there is my interest in Flying Boat."

"Could the Germans be after you for any reason at all?"

The Magnate weighed the question from a score of angles. He reached and secured a second cigar. "I don't think so," he said with a dark frown. "I don't think they would bother with me. I'm more or less retired. I've drawn out of a lot of things. Younger men are turning out the ammunition now."

"Then which of your friends might be responsible for this letter?"

"Well put!" exclaimed Stockbridge. "*Friends* may be right. Friends now, or former friends who have rounded on me."

"Name some!"

"There's Morphy!"

"We settled him. We should never hear from him again."

"I'm not so sure! You don't know him like I know him. He's a vindictive devil! He got ten to twenty years in state prison. You remember the case. He lost his appeal to the Governor, only last week. I blocked it through Tammany affiliations. You know what that fiend in stripes is capable of doing. He would sell his soul to get me!"

Drew grew serious. "Yes, I know," he said.

"Then there is—well, there are others. Ten, at least! What man can rise in this slippery city without pushing a few down the ladder? Wall Street and Broad Street and New Street are full of curb-stone blackmailers who knew me when I was struggling with my companies. They saw me take chances they themselves feared to take. They hounded me, then. Thank God, I got above them!"

Drew leaned over the table. "A few names," he said. "Something specific. Who of all of them would be capable of phoning the cemetery, representing himself to be your family physician and ordering the grave dug? Who might think of a thing like that?"

"Well, there's Harry Nichols, for instance. He's an ass with a champagne thirst and a shoestring salary. I threw him out of the house the other day. He was calling on Loris. Think of that! He's probably sworn to get me."

"How old is he?"

"About twenty-three—or four! Smokes, drinks and plays golf!"

"Name some others," suggested Drew artfully.

"Morphy!"

"I got him."

"Morphy's brother who escaped when we had Morphy indicted. I don't know where he is. Then there's Vogel and Vogel's friends.

Oh, there's a pirate crew of them. Some were mixed up in the first Flying Boat failure. They would all like to see me in Ridgewood Cemetery. I'll fool them!"

"You've given me Harry Nichols, Morphy, Morphy's brother, Vogel and Vogel's friends. That's four and a few outsiders. Can you think of any more?"

"Not at present! One of them is responsible for this letter. I want you to get busy. If you won't take the case, I'll get an agency that will. There's plenty!"

"I'll handle it," said Drew, "when it gets to be a case. As it is now, Mr. Stockbridge——"

"Buuurrrruuurrr! Buuurrruuurrr! Buuurrruuurrr!"

The Magnate started. He lowered his cigar, balanced it on the edge of the table, and turned slowly in his chair. He leaned over a smaller table which was littered with bronze ash-trays and inlaid match-boxes. He lifted the receiver of the insistent telephone. He pressed this to his ear.

Drew watched him narrowly. The terseness of a static charge of high voltage was in the great library. The face of the Munition Magnate grew cold with hauteur. It changed over the seconds to venom and red anger. His neck purpled. The diaphragm of the telephone instrument hissed its message. His hand clutched

the hard-rubber receiver with white strength. A click followed as the connection was broken. Stockbridge dropped the receiver upon the hook. He turned slowly and stared at Drew with eyes that had aged over the moments. Wrinkles shot from their corners. Sullen light gleamed in their yellow depths.

"What happened?" questioned Drew half rising from his chair and leaning over. "Who phoned?"

The Magnate's chin described an upward arc. His lips grew firm. Bulges showed at the sides of his jaw.

"What—who was it?" asked the detective.

Stockbridge stared at the letter upon the table. His neck changed from purple to a pasty ochre. A green sheen, like of death, overspread his crafty features. He was stricken with the clutch of fear.

Drew waited and thought rapidly. "What happened?" he asked with persuasion. "Nothing serious—I hope?"

"Serious," said Stockbridge absently. "Serious!" he snarled. "Yes, it was serious! It was a death threat! It was what I had expected. It follows the letter. They—he will get me! He—he——"

"Who?" asked the detective.

Drew heard the table creaking as Stockbridge's muscles stiffened—as the Magnate's

hands clutched the edge of the polished surface.

"Who?" he repeated on the alert for possible clews.

"Who! I don't know! But they will—he will!"

"Easy," said Drew. "Take it easy, sir. This is a modern age. We are in the heart of civilization. Nobody is going to *get* you! I'll see to that!"

"You can't see! This man knows everything. He said that I would be dead within twelve hours. That I would be in my grave in seventy-two hours. He mentioned the grave at Green—Ridgewood Cemetery. He gave secret details of my life which few alone know. Early follies of mine. An actress. A deal in War Babies and an electrical stock which was hushed up. I was the silent partner in that. How should this man know all of these things about me?"

"Just what did he say?"

"I've told you! He said enough! He threatened to kill me despite all the precautions I would take. He said I was marked for a death which all the police in the world couldn't solve. That I would be killed in spite of every effort to save me. What is it—poison? Have I already been given poison?"

Drew reached across the table and clutched the magnate's left wrist. He pulled out a flat watch and timed the pulse. "Normal, almost,"

he said softly. "You're normal, despite the shock. Your temperature is fair. I don't think it was a toxin he meant. That deadens a man and brings slow como."

"Well, what did he mean?" The magnate had found his voice and his old-time nerve. "What would you do in my case?" he said cunningly.

Drew glanced at the telephone. He raised his brows and swung, full-staring, upon Stockbridge. His finger pointed between the money-king's eyes. It was as steady as an automatic revolver.

"Did you recognize that voice?" he asked sharply. "Tell me the facts. I can't go ahead unless you do. I must work from facts!"

"No!" declared Stockbridge. "No, I did not! I never heard it before. I——"

"What was it like?"

"Hollow-whispering—almost feminine in tone. I thought it was a woman at first. It wasn't, though! It was a man or boy."

"Have you told me everything?"

"Yes—except this man or boy—this whispering voice, wound up by threatening to get my daughter, Loris, as soon as he finished with me. Said he'd clean up with her!"

"I'll take the case!" snapped Drew.

CHAPTER TWO

"THE MAGPIE"

THE Munition Magnate thrust a shaking hand toward the detective. "I'm glad!" he declared raising his voice. "You did well in the Morphy case. That's the reason I called upon you. Now find the miscreant or miscreants, who telephoned the cemetery superintendent, and you'll not be forgotten."

Drew glanced shrewdly at the 'phone. "May I use it?" he asked briskly. "I'll try to trace that call."

Stockbridge moved his chair away from the little table. Drew glided across the room, pressed the ash-trays and match-boxes to one side, and picked up the receiver. He worked the hook up and down with his broad thumb.

"Hello! Hello!" he repeated clicking the hook. "Hello, central! Hello!"

He glanced at Stockbridge as he waited. He frowned as he stooped and spoke more directly into the transmitter. "Hello! Hello!"

"Something the matter?" asked the Magnate with quick suspicion. "Don't they answer?"

"Hello! Hello! Hello, there!" Drew glared at the transmitter, then tapped the receiver against the silver-plated cover. "Hello!" he shouted. "Damn it, Hello!"

He turned. "No go," he said thoughtfully. "Connection seems to be broken. I'm talking right out into thin air. Wonder who cut your wires?"

Stockbridge bristled. He slid forward in his great chair and stared at the detective. "They're cut, eh?" he asked.

Drew set the 'phone on the table and turned. "Looks mighty like it," he said. His eyes swung over the walls of the splendid room. They rested upon a high, ebony stand with a belfry from which dangled a gilt spring suspending an ornate bird cage. Out of this cage, a magpie peered with beaded eyes. Its tail extended up through the bars like a feather from a hat.

"My bird," said Stockbridge. "A tame magpie I brought from Spain. It talks."

Drew raised his brows. He continued his search of the library. Its wealth of books and paintings and antiques almost stunned him. "I'm looking for another 'phone," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper. "Have you another 'phone in this house?"

"Yes. Two more. This is Gramercy Hill 9763. The one in Loris' room is Gramercy Hill

9764. Another in the butler's pantry, downstairs, is 9765. Perhaps the others are disconnected."

"We'll see. I want that call traced before it gets cold. I know a wire chief at Gramercy Hill Exchange. He'll help if I can get him. Have your butler show me his 'phone. Also, we better get a trouble-hunter, or report the cut wires. Somebody will pay for this! It's an outrage and a felony!"

Stockbridge moved his slippered foot and pressed a button under the larger table. He waited, then pressed again. His eyes wavered about the room. They fastened upon the portières which draped from the pole across the doorway leading into the hall. His tongue moistened dry lips as he watched for the butler.

"I'll 'phone my office," said Drew hurriedly as steps were heard in the hall. "I'll get up five operatives—no, six—right away. This all may be a hoax, but I've lived forty-one years too long to overlook a threat of this kind. Particularly when it concerns a man who has made as many enemies as you have."

The butler parted the portières as Drew ceased speaking. Stockbridge nodded and indicated that the detective wanted to go down stairs. The butler led the way to the lower telephone. Into this, Drew spoke hurriedly and

very much to the point. He secured three numbers in rapid succession. He snapped his orders in a manner to set the cut-glass tinkling on the pantry shelves. He hung up the receiver, glanced shrewdly at the servants about, then climbed the stairs like a boy of twelve.

"All is set!" he announced to Stockbridge as he entered the library and crossed to the table. "All moving, now! My wire-chief had gone home. I got the chief operator. She's going to send the first trouble-man handy. Delaney will be up from the office with his flying squad. I left it to him to arrange about tracing the call through a telephone official. No use telling the chief operator too much. The official will go right over her head and into the heart of the thing. Now,"—Drew pulled down the lapels of his black coat and leaned over the Magnate. "Now," he said with vigor, "now, what about your servants? I had a good look at some of them. How about that English butler? How long have you had him?"

"Ten years! Brought him over, myself. Wife picked the other servants. They're all old, tried and trusted. I'll answer for them. She died telling me to take care of them. I don't think her equal lived in choosing help. It was uncanny!"

Drew stroked his cropped mustache. "Good!" he said. "That's fine! We'll start

with the supposition that they're *not* guilty. Are any of them of German birth?"

"My valet is part German, but he ran away to avoid their army. He hates the Junker party. Says 'It is responsible for the War.'"

"How long have you had him?"

"Nine years."

"That should let him out. Well," Drew added with a sweeping glance about the library, "well, these big windows—how about them?"

The detective advanced to the front of the room as he asked the question. "Two," he mused. "Two bay-windows of the superior order. Curtains very heavy and rich. There's a good catch on this one," he added springing upon the radiator-box. "And a good catch on this one. Both catches are closed. Seem to have been closed for some time. Here's dust. High-class housekeeper, but I've got her here."

Drew smiled as he ran his fingers over the upper sash. He peered out into the Avenue with its flowing tide of vehicles. He turned and said to Stockbridge:

"Suppose you order your butler or doorman to shut the outside blinds. It's getting dark and cold. I want to be sure that no one can get through this way."

"Good," said Stockbridge reaching for the button with his toe. "Good! We'll take every precaution. Twelve hours will show the thing

one way or the other. Twelve hours should do it."

The butler entered bearing a silver tray. He set this on a mahogany tea-wagon and rolled it to the Magnate's chair. Drew frowned at the sight of a black bottle and one glass. A signal of understanding had been sent to the perfect servant.

Stockbridge moistened his thin lips thirstily. He whispered the instructions concerning the blinds. The butler withdrew like a shadow merging into a shadow. Drew shrugged his shoulders and went the round of the library with the keen, trained scrutiny of a man-hunter and a modern operative. He paused before a case of morocco-bound books. "These cases?" he asked. "How about them? What's behind?"

"Books! Books!" shrilled the magpie.

Drew raised his brows and swung upon the bird.

"Books! Books!" repeated the pet. "Books, books, books!"

"Fine bird," said Drew with thought. "But what is behind the cases, Mr. Stockbridge? I don't want to move them if the walls are all right."

A glass clicked against the silver tray as the Magnate answered hastily:

"All right! They're all right. I was here when they were filled. I just ordered so many

feet of books. Six hundred feet, I think it was. I never look at them. All that I ever read is the magazines and the financial items in the newspapers."

"The pictures—paintings," Drew said.

"Pictures! Pictures!" repeated the magpie.

"Shut up!" snarled Stockbridge. "Keep quiet, Don!"

The bird ruffled its feathers and leaped to a top perch. It peered from there at Drew, with its head cocked sideways.

"How about them?" repeated the detective.

"I had them hung by my orders," Stockbridge said. "They're all right. Nothing but a strong wall behind. No need to bother about them."

"Everything is important," Drew suggested with a slight reproof in his voice. "Trifles may make for the answer to the riddle."

"That Corot over there is no trifle. It cost me thirty-five thousand dollars in France!"

Drew lifted the lower edge of the painting from the wall. Dust fell. He pressed his face against the paper and looked behind the canvas. Letting the frame back he tried the same operation with the other paintings of size.

"No secret panel, or anything queer," he said finally as he dusted his hands. "All's well with the walls. Now the floor. How about trap-doors?"

"Impossible!" Stockbridge exclaimed. "I'm sure these rugs have been taken out and cleaned every time I go to my country-place. A trap-door would be noticed!"

"I'm trying to find out," suggested Drew glancing from the bottle to the purple face of the Magnate. "Please answer me if you want to get results. I've got to see that no one comes into this library for the next twelve hours. After that period of time—we can breathe easier."

"Go on," said Stockbridge feeling the thrust.

"This door," Drew said. "The door to the hall. Can it be locked securely?"

"Yes! It can be locked and bolted from the inside. I often lock myself in—in——"

Stockbridge stiffened in his chair. He glanced toward the portières. He leaned forward and attempted to shield the view of the quarter-emptied Bourbon-bottle and the used glass, as a girl in lavender and Irish-lace swept into the room.

Drew recognized Loris Stockbridge from newspaper photos. He held his breath as she glided by him, unseeingly. He touched his mustache and waited. Her face, framed in close -drawn hair the color of midnight sky, softened perceptibly as she swished round the great table in the center of the library and laid an unjeweled hand upon her father's shoulder.

She turned with a start as she realized that Stockbridge was not alone. Drew bowed with swift courtesy.

"Mr. Drew," said the Magnate. "Mr. Drew, my daughter, Loris."

Again the detective bowed. He met her level glance with a smile in his brown eyes. She answered it and leaned over her father's shoulder. Drew wheeled and fell to studying the titles on the books. He moved to the magpie's cage. He extended one finger. The bird fluttered and sprang from perch to perch.

Drew thrust his hands into his pockets. He heard Loris speaking in terse, throaty tones to her father. He could not well avoid catching the tenor of their conversation. It concerned the letter from the cemetery and the threat of death within twelve hours, which the Magnate repeated to her with a softness in his aged voice.

A gushing torrent of unbridled emotion poured down upon his gray head. The girl paced the floor between the chair and the table. She fell to her knees with swift grace.

"Be careful, father," she sobbed. "You must be so careful. Remember you're all that I have, now. That letter and that telephone call means that somebody is planning to destroy you. Oh, father, be careful. What would happen if you were taken away from me?"

"You'd marry that cad—Nichols!" blurted Stockbridge. "I'm the one thing that stands in his way. You'd marry him—wouldn't you?"

The girl rose proudly. Drew, from the shadow outside the rose-light, studied the slender figure crowned with a close-drawn turban of blue-black hair. His eyes ranged down to her slipper heels. They lifted again. He stroked his chin as he waited for her answer. It came truthfully enough and with high spirit.

"Yes, I'll marry him some day. I want your permission, but with it or without it, father, I am going to marry him. He's a captain in the Army. Doesn't that prove he is not all the things you said he was?"

"Good girl," said Drew in whispered admiration.

"It proves nothing!" exclaimed Stockbridge stiffening in his chair and half rising. "He's a cad and an ass under all his uniform. He's too poor to be considered for one moment. I want my daughter to marry——"

"Whom she pleases," said Loris. "Harry may be poor, but he's not too proud to fight!"

"Bah! They get those uniforms so the girls will notice them. What does he know about war?"

"He's been at Plattsburg for three months. He's in town on furlough. He's helping us with Red Cross work. Isn't that noble!"

"That part's all right," said the Magnate. "I want you to keep him from me, that's all. I believe he's half German!"

"He's not! Harry is all-American. His mother was born of German parents in this country. His father was Canadian. You've heard of the Nichols who built part of the Grand Trunk Railroad. Was he German?"

Stockbridge paled under the torrent which gushed from the girl's lips.

"Well, all right," he said resignedly. "Don't bring him here or allow him to call. I've too much to think about to worry over Harry Nichols. You better go to your room and think things over."

Loris glanced at her wrist-watch. She leaned with quick motion and kissed her father on the forehead. She turned at the portières and threw back her head.

"Good-by, Mr. Drew," she said prettily. "I hope that you have not been annoyed."

The detective, naturally quick at answering, found his tongue tied in his mouth. He stammered a reply, which was too late. Loris swished through the curtains, leaving the room empty for her passing.

"A mighty fine girl," was Drew's whispered comment. "They don't often come like that. She's very high class. She's got spirit. I'd

hate to snatch a delusion from that young lady —Harry Nichols, for instance."

"Come here!" broke in Stockbridge.

Drew crossed the rugs. He stood by the magnate's side. He watched him pour out a half-glass of Bourbon and take the whisky neat. He frowned. "Well?" he asked.

"Not a word from your men or the telephone company?" asked Stockbridge, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "That's queer, isn't it?"

Drew took out his watch. He replaced it after a glance at the dial. His eyes wandered to a little Sèvres clock on a book-case. "It's time for both," he said. "It's——"

"There's somebody now—go see," Stockbridge whispered tersely. "Somebody is in the hallway."

The portières parted and revealed the beef-red face of the English butler. He advanced a step.

"The trouble-man from the telephone company is 'ere, sir," he said. " 'E's 'ere! 'E's been hover the junctions in the halley, sir. 'E's looked at the junction-box. 'E says, sir, there's no trouble there. 'E says 'it must be in 'ere, sir.' "

"In 'ere, sir," repeated the magpie with a loud squawking and rustle of wings. "Junction-

box! Junction-box!" it cried with its head through the gilded bars.

"Shut up, Don!" ordered Stockbridge. "Be a good bird," he added sharply. "Now, Straker, you may show the trouble-hunter up."

"Trouble-hunter! Trouble-hunter!" echoed the magpie.

Drew, somewhat amused, thrust his hands in the pockets of his coat and eyed the opening between the curtains. A click of tools sounded metallically. A shambling step was in the hallway.

"This woiy," said the butler in a superior tone. "Right this woiy, you!"

The portières parted. A slouching figure, with a greasy cap drawn far down over the eyes, entered the library with a lineman's satchel on his hip. He swung the strap from his shoulder, glanced at Stockbridge and then at the detective. He dropped the satchel to the floor and scratched his head.

"Take a look at this 'phone," said Drew. "Go over the wires. Look for any cuts. The trouble ought not to be in here."

Stockbridge rose and made room for the lineman, who lifted the satchel and strode to the 'phone. He dropped to one knee by the little table. He fished forth a testing-set from his shirt. It was bound with two leads of cotton-insulated wire.

"I'll test here," he suggested, clamping a set of claws into the wires which came through the molding and entered the ringing-box.

"Hello!" he said. "Hello, this you, Saidee? Say, Saidee, give me Franklin Official, seventeen. Yes . . . all right! Hello! This you, Tupper? Say, Tupper, I went over the junction-box in the alley back of the house. Everything O. K. there. I'll go over the leads in the house. Loose connection somewhere, I guess."

A clicking of tools followed as the lineman selected a pair of pliers. They rattled over the binding-posts at the receiver. They tightened the connections. He went over the transmitter, and then every inch of the exposed wiring. He removed the cover of the ringing-box and examined the connections. Replacing this cover, he rose with a puzzled expression.

"All right," he said to Stockbridge, who was standing with his back turned. "It's all right here, sir. I don't find a thing. See—it's all right."

The trouble-hunter lifted the receiver from the hook. "Hello," he said in a low voice. "Hello, Saidee. Say, Saidee, what number is this on your board?"

The lineman glanced around the room. His eyes widened. He whistled with naïve admiration. "Hello," he said softly. "Yes . . . Gramercy Hill 9763. That's right. O. K. Tell

Franklin Official—tell Tupper that I took forty minutes on the job. Forty minutes at time and a half. Don't forget that. Yes . . . bridle—everything, all right, Saidee. See you later."

The trouble-hunter reached for his satchel. He hitched it over his shoulder.

"Hold on!" said Drew. "What *was* the trouble? Why couldn't we get Central?"

"You can search me—sir. It wasn't in this room, mister. That's a Western-Union cinch!"

"Where was it?"

"I don't know."

"How about the junction-box in the alley? Could it have been there?"

"Well it could—come to think of it. I scraped an' cleaned th' connections to make sure. They're all right now."

"Did you see anybody about?"

The lineman hitched up the satchel and scratched his ear. "Seems to me, I did. A fellow climbed over the fence from the back yard of this house just as I swings in from the side street. It was snowin' a bit an' I couldn't see very well."

"What kind of looking fellow?" snapped Drew with awakened interest. "German?"

"You took th' very words right out of my mouth," said the trouble-hunter. "He looked like a German."

"Describe him! Tall, fat or small?"

"I wasn't near enough to notice for sure. Tall, I think. He went out the alley and turned toward Fifth Avenue."

"Could he have called us up from that junction-box?"

"Sure—if he had a set of testers like this." The lineman tapped his shirt with his left hand. "He could have talked with you, but he couldn't ring your bell without a magneto or an alternating current of some kind."

"Could he have cut the wires and connected them again without Central noticing anything out of the ordinary?"

"He might. But who would do that, sir?"

"That's all!" said Drew in dismissal. "Here's a dollar. Keep still about your visit here. We may want you later."

"Want you later," repeated the magpie.

Drew turned toward Stockbridge as the lineman shuffled through the portières. "Queer," he said. "Tall fellow, eh! That's the man who cut in and threatened you. We'll get him! I'll go out and see if Delaney has arrived. Two hours of the twelve have passed. Ten more should see you safely out of it."

CHAPTER THREE

"THE MAN IN OLIVE-DRAB"

TRIGGY DREW stood on the marble steps of the Stockbridge mansion. The butler had just helped him on with his coat. The door had closed softly. The outer air gripped with cold that crackled. A soft snow was falling upon the city. It blurred the view of the Avenue, as seen to north and south. It wound the opposite buildings with a shroud of winter.

The detective squared his shoulders, thrust his hands in his pockets for warmth, and hurried out between the iron-grilled gates, which stood slightly ajar. He hesitated a moment on the sidewalk. Again he glanced up and down the Avenue. The soft purring of a motor sounded. A taxi churned through the snow. It came to a slow stop at the opposite curb. The glow from an overhead arc showed that this taxi was crammed black with men.

"That's Delaney and his squad," said the detective turning up his collar. "He's late."

Drew crossed the Avenue on a long diagonal. He eyed the alert chauffeur. He rounded the

taxi and jerked open its door. The orders he whispered to the squad of operatives were terse and to the point.

"Keep Stockbridge's block covered," he said. "Watch all four corners. Two of you get into the alley, back of the house, and climb the fence. Keep your eyes on the junction-box and the telephone wires. Don't let anybody touch them. All out, now. It's a big job with double-pay, men!"

The cramped operatives climbed out and stood on the sidewalk. They glanced from Drew to the towering spires of the Stockbridge mansion. Their eyes grew hard with calculation.

"She's big," repeated Drew. "You know who lives there? He's been threatened twice. Somebody gave him twelve hours to live. Two of the twelve are gone. It's up to us to see that nothing happens in the next ten."

Delaney touched his hat. "All right, Chief," he said. "We'll see. I'll answer for the boys I brought. I'll get rid of this taxi." The operative turned toward the driver.

"Keep it around the corner on the side street," Drew ordered. "Have him turn and head this way. We can't tell what minute we will need him."

Delaney gave the order. He paired off the operatives and sent them hurrying through the

snow. Drew noticed that he had brought six men for the assignment.

"Good," he said as the last operative disappeared. "Six is better than five. This thing is widening out. I wouldn't wonder if we needed more, before the night passes."

"What's coming off?" asked Delaney with an Irish grin. "Another stock scandal like the Flying Boat one?"

"An echo of it—perhaps," said Drew. "It's dog eat dog, I guess. Stockbridge is no saint. Some man with a whispering—consumptive voice has 'phoned him the news that he was going to die before daylight. I don't think he is. Not if I can help it."

"Who did he rob this time—the old devil!"

"He's retired. It's a case, perhaps, of thieves falling out in high places. Remember how Stockbridge beat Morphy to the District Attorney and told all he knew, and went before the Grand Jury? Morphy may be behind this threat-by-wire."

"Morphy's behind bars, Chief!"

"I know that. He's always dangerous, though."

"Another old devil," said Delaney thrashing his arms. "I can see him now, Chief, in his big automobile. A husky man with a leather coat and cap. And always a woman by his side, Chief. A different woman, every time!"

"He fell a long way, Delaney. Come on. We'll forget Morphy for a while. Stockbridge is alone. He is in danger."

Drew clutched the operative's arm and motioned across the street. They plunged through the snow with heads down. They entered the iron-grilled gate. Drew touched a button set in the stone of the doorway. He repeated the signal.

The door opened to a crack. A chain rattled. A face blotted out the inner light of the mansion.

"All right," said Drew. "All right, butler. This is one of my operatives. Let us in."

The butler led the way through the hall of old masters, after taking the detectives' coats and hats. He parted the curtains and announced the operatives. Drew pressed Delaney into the library.

Stockbridge sat in the same position between the tables. The rose-light from the ornate lamp brought out deep lines which transversed his yellow face. Fear gave way to a mumbling satisfaction as he stared at the two resolute detectives who had come to guard him. He rested his eyes upon Delaney. His brows raised in inquiry.

"This is Delaney," said Drew. "He's the man who brought back Morphy from Hartford. He's true blue. Delaney, this is your case as

well as mine. Your old prisoner may be involved."

"Morphy ain't in it, Chief. He's locked up tighter than the Sub-Treasury's strong-box. It's some one else."

"What did you get on the telephone call? The call I had you trace through Spencer Ott, the Chief Electrician?"

"Nothing, as yet! I waited. That's what kept me so long." Delaney glanced at his watch.

"He'll 'phone later, I guess," said Drew. "Now," he added turning toward Stockbridge. "Now, let's cover everything in this house. What time was it, Delaney?"

"Nine forty-eight, when I looked, Chief."

"That's early. Suppose you allow a half hour for a search of the upper house. Take that time and go over everything. Pay particular attention to Mr. Stockbridge's rooms. Look at the windows. See that they are locked. See that there are no places where a man could be hidden. You'll permit Delaney to do this, Mr. Stockbridge?"

The Munition Magnate nodded. He kept his eyes on Drew, who still faced him. "Do you think it is necessary?" he asked. "I'll answer for my servants."

"We must suspect everybody," Drew said. "Go on, Delaney. Find the butler and let

him show you around. I've searched in here."

Delaney started toward the portières as Stockbridge reached down and pressed the floor-button with his finger.

"Just a moment," said Drew with afterthought. "You better knock on Miss Stockbridge's door and ask permission to go through her suite. There's just a chance that you might see something."

"Might see something!" shrilled the magpie.

Delaney turned with a startled half-oath. "Wot's that?" he asked, aggressively clenching his huge fists.

"Might be something!" chortled the magpie.

"Go on," Drew laughed. "That's only a magpie."

"Looks like a crow, Chief. It sure startled me. I thought we had the villain right here."

Drew waited. Delaney—with a last glance toward the bird-cage—followed the butler to the upper floors of the mansion. Drew opened the letter and studied it. He examined the postmark. He heard, as he was replacing the paper in the envelope, the click of the glass against the bottle at Stockbridge's side. There followed a dry chuckle of inner satisfaction. A match was struck. Cigar smoke wreathed under the rose-light and floated toward a high radiator which was over the book-cases. Drew went over to these and glanced upward. The

gilt-grilled ventilator, through which the smoke passed, was narrow and set within the wall-plaster. It showed no sign of marks at its edge. It was the only opening, save the door and the two great windows at the front, which led from or into the library.

He returned to the center of the library. A swishing sounded. Loris, with eyes aflame, glided into the room. The curtains dropped behind her with soft rustling. She glanced from Drew to her father. She stamped her slippered foot upon the thick pile of the rug before the doorway.

"By what right?" she said to Drew. "By whose orders have you sent that awful man to my rooms?"

Drew flushed beneath the olive of his skin.

"*I* sent him," he admitted guiltily. "I never thought you would be offended, Miss Stockbridge."

"I am—greatly so! Do you mistrust me?"

"Miss Stockbridge," Drew hastened to say with soft apology. "Miss Loris—that thought never entered my mind. It never did! I'll have Mr. Delaney out, right away. He should not have gone in without your permission. I told him to knock and ask you."

"My maid let him in. I—I——"

Drew studied her gown. It had been changed. The Irish lace and the lavender one had been

replaced by an Oxford-gray tailor-made suit which fitted her slender, elegant form like a close glove. Her slippers were topped with fawn-hued spats. One ring was on her finger. It was a solitaire of price. It gleamed and flashed in the rose-light as she raised her hand to her hair.

"I'll have Delaney right out," repeated Drew, bowing and starting for the doorway.

"No!"

Drew paused. He turned. The magnate towered over the table. His eyes were blood-shot and glazed with resolve.

"No!" he declared. "No, you'll not have him out! Let him do his duty! Loris, go upstairs!"

"But, father——"

"Go—up—stairs!"

The girl flushed. Scarlet ripples rose from her young breast. Her cheeks crimsoned into two burning spots. She wheeled, gathered up her skirt, and glided swiftly through the portières which dropped behind her like a curtain of a stage.

"Go—up—stairs," quoted the magpie greatly excited.

Drew retained the vision of Loris long after her footsteps had ceased to sound in the hallway. He grew thoughtful as he waited. There were details to the case which already caused

him concern. It was evident that the girl was tremendously high-spirited and willful. Her obedience to her father's demand had only been after a struggle with her turbulent nature. She had given in to him, but friction was there which might cause trouble at a future hour.

Delaney parted the portières, finally. He strode into the library with a flushed face. He lifted one brow as he jerked his head upward in a mute signal to Drew.

"I guess it's all O. K.," he blurted swinging toward Stockbridge and eyeing the bottle beside the telephone. "O. K. upstairs. I searched most everything—posted a valet at the master's suite and took a look into Miss Stockbridge's rooms. They seem all right. I guess they're all right," he added with candor, which Drew understood referred to the girl and her outburst in her boudoir.

"Good," Drew said closing his lips. "That's good. Now, Mr. Stockbridge," he added, "there will be eight of us on the outside of this house. You have your trusted servants inside. There's three telephones in good order, thanks to the trouble-man. There's the entire New York Police and Detective Departments to back us up. There should be no trouble."

The Magnate blinked beneath the cone of rose-light. He wet his dry lips. He rubbed his

scaly hands. "Any orders to me?" he asked determinedly. "What shall I do?"

"You lock this library door when Delaney and I go out. Lock it and bolt it securely. Don't take a particle of food. Don't drink any water. Try to get along to-night without sampling anything."

Stockbridge reached for the bottle of Bourbon. He held it up to the light. It was half full. "All right," said he. "I might finish part of this—that's all."

Drew glanced at Delaney. "That'll be all right," he said turning. "That bottle's been tested. You might let this officer try a little of it. Nothing like being sure, you know."

Delaney was willing. The drink he poured, after the butler brought a clean glass, would have cost him considerable money in war time. He up-ended it neat. He smiled as one hand rested upon his chest. "Fine!" he said with sincerity. "There's nothin' th' matter with that!"

Drew turned toward the portières, where, between, the butler waited. "We'll go now," he said. "Remember—lock and bolt this door. Instruct your man to stay outside and not to leave it under any circumstances. When you go up to your bedroom, have him go with you. Then lock the upstairs door and let your valet sleep across the threshold. You can have a mattress

moved for that purpose. I'll come in—first thing in the morning. Good night, sir!"

"Good night," repeated Stockbridge rising from his chair and leaning his hands upon the polished surface of the table. "Good night to both of you!"

Drew glanced back as the butler pressed in the curtains and started closing the hard-wood door. The Magnate still stood erect under the rich glow from the overhead cone. His eyes were slit-lidded and defiant. He glared about the room like an aged lion in a jungle-glade. He started around the table.

The door closed. Drew waited in the hallway. He heard the lock snap. The bolt shot home. Stockbridge was alone in a sealed room.

"Watch this door!" ordered Drew clutching the butler's purple sleeve. "Watch it like a cat. Stay right near it under any and all circumstances. Don't go away from it. It may mean life or death to your master."

"I'll stoiy right 'ere, sir."

"See that you do," cautioned the Detective. "See that you do."

Delaney found the hats and coats in the foyer. These they donned, opened the outer door, and stepped into the night with jaws squared and hands thrust deep in their pockets.

They crossed the snow-mantled Avenue upon a long diagonal which brought them to the up-

town corner and the waiting taxi, whose engine was softly purring beneath its hooded bonnet.

The driver was asleep. He woke as Drew laid a hand on his arm.

"Seen anything?" asked the Detective.

"Nothin', boss, but snow. Nothin' at all," he yawned.

Delaney glanced about. He opened the taxi door on the street side and lunged inward with a sigh of relief. Drew followed and pulled the door shut.

"Where's the bunch?" he asked. "Just how did you post them?"

"Flood's with the fixed-post cop on the Avenue. He's down a block. Flynn and Cassady are in the alley—in the yard, I mean. They're watching the junction-box and the wires. Joe and O'Toole went east. Harrigan is planted across the street. That's him between the two buildings. See him?"

Drew rubbed the rear glass of the taxi. He pressed his nose against this. A blurred form, almost obliterated by falling snow, showed where the operative was guarding the mansion.

Delaney, who was watching out through another window, suddenly clutched Drew by the arm. "Look!" he exclaimed. "Look, Chief! Over toward the big house!"

The Detective drew back from his study of Harrigan. He turned on the seat and followed

Delaney's pointing finger. He clamped his jaw shut with a click of strong teeth.

"Somebody's coming out of Stockbridge's," said the operative.

"Quek!" signaled Drew. "Watch closely," he added in a whisper.

A girl came through the doorway and opened the iron-grilled gates. She paused and glanced north and south through the curtain of down-falling snow. She turned with resolution and hurried along the east side of the Avenue. She was at the corner opposite the taxi, when Drew reached and opened the door with sly fingers.

"Tail her," he ordered. "Right after her, Delaney. I'd know that little lady in a million."

"Who is she, Chief?"

"Loris Stockbridge!"

"Sure?"

"Yes! Right after her! There—she turned east. See her white spats? See her furs? Some queen to be out a night like this. Don't let her get too far ahead of you. That's right, Delaney!"

The operative sprang to the curb. He rounded the hood of the taxi. He slouched along the pavement to the corner, waited for the fraction of a minute until a limousine passed, then hurried over the Avenue. He disappeared into the canyon whose walls were towering apart-

ments and whose end was marked by a row of soft arcs across which, snow falling from house-tops, sparkled in the night like diamonds beyond price.

The Avenue churned with returning theater-parties and night-hawk cabs. The roar of the city came to the waiting Detective's ears like a giant turning in his first sleep. The sifting snow sanded against the windows of the taxi. The purring motor missed sparking now and then. It shook the cab as it resumed its revolving with a sputter and a cough in the muffler. The driver huddled deeper in his sheep-skin coat collar. He snored in synchronism with the engine.

Drew rubbed the glass before him and studied the aspect with close-lidded intentness. He marked the shut gates of the Mansion down the Avenue. He saw that the lights from the inner globes had been extinguished. He counted the staring windows. His eyes lowered to the soft rose-glow which streamed out through the shut-blinds of the library. Snow was on the slats and sills.

A swift crunch of heavy shoes at the side of the taxi—the turning of the door-lock—the burly form in black that climbed in, announced Delaney.

"All right, Chief!" he said somewhat out of

breath. "All right—move over. Here she comes back!"

Drew rubbed a frosted pane with his elbow. A blurred form—close to the sheltering wall of the side street—revealed itself into Loris Stockbridge. She turned the corner. She glanced back over her sabled shoulder. She pressed her gloved hands deep within her muff and almost ran for the iron-grilled gates of the mansion.

"She connected with a blonde lad in olive-drab uniform!" said Delaney. "He gave her something that looked to me like a revolver. Wot d'ye make out-a that, Chief?"

CHAPTER FOUR

"THE MURDER"

TRIGGY DREW had no good answer for Delaney's question concerning the revolver. The matter was important in view of the threat aimed toward Stockbridge. Why Loris should obtain a gun from a rendezvous in a drug-store was more than the Detective could fathom. He turned to Delaney.

"Explain yourself!" he snapped, gripping the operative by the sleeve. "Make yourself clear! We have no time to waste in this matter!"

Delaney gulped and whispered. "It's this way. I follows the girl until she turns around the corner where there is an all-night drug-store. She was in a telephone-booth when I came up and looked through the window. She was trying to get a number. While she's trying, a taxi rushes up and out jumps a lad in a long benny. He pays the driver with a bill and hurries past me and into the drug-store. I gets a good look at him. He's about twenty-three years old, blonde hair and tall——"

"Tall?"

"He was five feet eleven, Chief. I'd say that to be safe. The uniform he wore under the benny was olive-drab with bars on his shoulder. He took the overcoat off—afterwards."

"How many bars?"

"Two, Chief."

"That's good!" exclaimed Drew with sudden vigor. "Good!"

"The girl," went on Delaney, "was 'phoning for him. She dropped the receiver when she heard him come in. She had the party she wanted—right there. Good deduction—that is!"

The Detective snorted. "Go on," he said with a faint frown.

"Sure it was! Well, I moves over and starts puttin' a penny in the slot-machine outside the drug-store. The machine didn't work very well on account of the snow. I'm a long time gettin' my piece of chewin'-gum. I sees them talking in the drug-store. His coat is off 'cause it's warm inside. He had an officer's uniform on."

"One bar or two?"

"Two bars on his shoulder, Chief."

"Captain, then. Go on."

"He's a tall lad with thick lips and wide-blue eyes. He's straight as a pike-staff and good lookin'—for a blonde."

"Looks German?"

"Not so I could notice! Seemed to be a bit of a swell. Had gloves and a high-class wrist watch. I hate them things."

Drew smiled. "Hurry," he said. "Don't take too long. What happened? What about the smoke-wagon?"

"I'm comin' to it, Chief. They moves over to the drug-case. They chins some more. Then he blows her to a soda—a cherry sundae."

Drew rubbed the glass at his side and started out. He swept the mansion with swift-running eyes. He turned.

"They were sweet—them two," went on Delaney with thought. "I deducts they'd known each other a long while."

"Quit your deducting. Get to facts!"

"Well, Chief, he ups and gives the drug-store the once over with sharp looks. Then he handed her a little, flat box which she pops into her muff—quick as any shop-hister. It was as quick as that!"

"How do you know it was a revolver?"

"By what followed, Chief."

"What followed?"

"Her hand creeps into the muff. It works around while the clerk is mixin' the sundae. When the clerk's back is turned, out comes the hilt of a nice, little gat with ivory trimmin's. It's one of them lovely watch-charm affairs—

all polished up without a knock-out punch."

"A twenty-two?"

"About that. It's the caliber them actresses carry in their stockings. It might kill, though, at short range."

"Go on, Delaney. Tell me what happened then?"

"I gets my chewin'-gum, Chief. I backs to the curb. They finish their sundae. I'm across the street when the lad goose-steps out of the drug-store—alone. O'Toole was talking with the fixed-post cop and a Central Office man half-way down the block. They gets my office when I pulls out my handkerchief. The C. O. dick covers the corner. O'Toole falls in behind the lad in the fur benny as he passes him, with collar turned up and leggins working at a double-time through the snow."

"That's good! O'Toole will put him to bed."

"Sure, Chief. Leave it to O'Toole. He never lost a tail yet. He'll follow that lad to France —unless you call him off."

Drew polished the glass and strained his eyes in the direction of Stockbridge's mansion. The Avenue had quieted over the hour after midnight. A few belated pedestrians, muffled to the brows, glanced at the waiting taxi with curiosity. They did not stop, however.

Delaney drew out his watch and studied its

dial by aid of the light which streamed from a corner arc. He replaced the watch.

"Twelve-forty-five," he announced. "Wish I'd brought a pint along. I would have, if the dame hadn't come out of the drug-store so quick."

"Did she buy anything—or do anything, after the officer left her?"

"No! Just waited a second, then came sailin' out without a smile. Had her hands crammed in her muff. That's where the revolver was. Bet it was loaded."

"More deduction," said Drew. "Don't jump at conclusions, Delaney. Get facts and work from them. Get——"

The Detective's voice trailed into silence. He reached swiftly and wiped his hand over the frosted pane. He pressed his nose against the glass until it became white with cold. He jerked back his head.

"Quek!" he signaled from deep down in his throat. "Quek, Delaney! Open the door. Somebody is coming out of the house!"

Delaney twisted the handle. A breath of stinging air swept into the taxi's heated space. Snow followed and drifted across the detectives' knees. Both men strained in one position. Their eyes burned as they waited with grim-set lips.

A light shone from the lower entrance of the

mansion. Its oblong brought out in bold-relief the details of the iron-grilled gates. Across this fine snow sifted. A man emerged. He closed the door. He opened the gates and staggered toward the Avenue's curb. He stood, bare-headed in the night. His chin swung north and south with helpless motion. He fixed his eyes upon the waiting taxi, with a start of recognition. He came over the surface of the Avenue with faltering, bewildered steps.

"The butler!" snapped Drew. "That's Stockbridge's butler! What's happened?"

"God only knows!" exclaimed Delaney.

Drew climbed over the operative and sprang to the curb. He charged around the rear of the taxi and brought up with a jerk before the startled servant.

"What is it?" he asked sharply.

The butler stammered an incoherent answer. His eyes wavered from the taxi to the mansion —then back again. They gripped to a dead-lock with the detective's own.

"What happened?" exclaimed Drew.

"I don't know, sir. I don't know——"

"Keep cool! Answer me!" The Detective clutched the butler's shoulder with a vise-grip. "Answer me," he repeated. "What happened? What is the matter—over there?"

"I don't——"

"None of that! Answer! Answer!"

"The telephone company, sir. The telephone people rang me . . . they rang me hup hon the downstairs 'phone, sir. They said . . . she said . . . the chief-loidy said for me to 'ang the receiver hup hon the Gramercy 'ill 'ook, sir. The 9763 one, sir."

"Which one is that—the library?"

"It his, sir!"

"Go on! Go on! Go on!"

"I goes back where I 'ad left the second-man, sir, by the door, sir, as you'd ordered, sir. I knocks 'ard on the door."

"Yes! Yes!" said Drew, feeling Delaney's hot breath over his shoulder. "Yes! Go on!"

"I knocks, sir. I pounds 'ard. I 'ammers and 'ammers hon the wood, sir. 'E don't answer—'e don't."

Drew's face grew stern. "Well?" he asked still holding the butler's eyes. "Well—what then?"

"I knocks some 'arder. Then the second-man, 'e knocks. 'E 'its the door with 'is 'eel, sir!"

"Come on!" said Drew, turning and clasping Delaney's sleeve. "Come on—something *is* wrong!"

The detective swept the Avenue with a sharp glance as he hurried across the wheel-churned ice and snow. He signaled to Harrigan by drawing a handkerchief. That operative de-

tached himself from the shadow between the two houses and moved toward the corner. He stood there on guard as Drew hurried through the iron-grilled gates and thrust his knee against the door. It opened. Delaney and the butler crowded in. They mounted the inner stairs on tiptoes. Drew's hand went behind him in warning. He turned at the top of the landing. The second-man was standing before the library door with folded arms and a watch-dog expression on his cockney face. He remained in that position as Drew glided to his side.

"Hear anything?" asked the detective.

"Never a word, sir. Hit's blym quiet hin there. Hi think 'e's 'ad something 'appen, sir. 'E never acted like that—before, sir. Sometimes 'e sleeps, but 'e always wakes hup when the walley comes after 'im, sir."

" 'E does," echoed the butler with chattering teeth.

"Are you sure you tried to unlock this door?" queried Drew, twisting the knob. "Have you tried the outer lock? You might have shot the bolt in your excitement."

"The key to the houter lock, sir, is hinside!"

"It is!" snapped Drew, pressing against the panel as he listened close up to the chamfering. "It is, eh? That's funny."

" 'E put hit there, sir. The master did, sir!"

Drew did not dwell further on this. He stared at Delaney, with unseeing eyes. He bent and listened for a second time. He stiffened suddenly. He jerked back.

"Listen," he whispered tersely. "Everybody listen. What's that noise inside? Hear it? Hear it, Delaney?"

The operative dropped to his knees and pressed his ear to a faint line of light below the door. He rose, dusting his knees. He swore audibly.

"What is it?" asked Drew.

"Sounds like the crow, Chief."

"Stockbridge's magpie?"

"Something like that."

The Detective laid his ear flat against the keyhole. His face hardened as he waited. He lifted his head and pointed with a steady finger. "Listen!" he commanded. "There—listen. That's no magpie!"

A low whine like the howl of a wild thing rose to a reed note of moribund terror. It died; then resumed its shrieking. It leaped the octaves from no note to a blare of a soul in agony. Suddenly it struck down the tone scale with descending steps of mocking laughter.

"Look out!" shouted Drew, bending his knees and gliding back to the wall of the hallway. "Look out!" he repeated.

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Delaney huskily.

"Do? I'm going to break the door down! Look out!"

The detective braced himself against the wall. He lunged forward and crashed against the dark panel near the lock and bolt, with the energy of a college fullback. He backed away and repeated the smashing blow.

"Hold on, Chief," Delaney said. "That's no use. The door is two inches thick. I had a good look at it. Wait!"

Drew rubbed his right shoulder as Delaney turned toward the white-faced butler.

"You get an ax!" he ordered. "Beat it, and get a big ax, quick!"

"The axes are in the furnace room, sir."

"Get one! Bring it right up, you. Hurry now!"

The operative turned toward Drew. "The only way, Chief," he explained. "I've been in too many of Big Bill Devery's raids not to know how to break down a strong door. I'm the man who took Honest John Kelsey's house apart for him. It was built like a British tank."

The puffing butler appeared with a fire ax. He handed it to Delaney, who eyed the edge with concern.

"Not sharp," he said, "but it'll do, at a pinch. Look out—everybody!"

Delaney waved the servants away. He moistened his broad palms. He swung the ax and crashed its weight into the panel nearest the lock. He followed this blow with another. He panted as he rained swinging slashes at the dark wood. It splintered. An opening was made. This opening was enlarged by short-arm jabs until Drew laid a hand on Delaney's shoulder and called a halt. "Let me see," he said bending down.

He straightened. He enlarged the chopped place with his fingers. He ripped off the splinters until there was room for a palm to be inserted. Delaney, dropping the ax upon the hall-rug, thrust through his arm to the elbow. He bent his knee as he strained. His face screwed into a knot.

"Is the key there?" asked Drew.

"Ye—s. I turned it. All the way, Chief. Here's the bolt. Both were locked tight. Both locked, on the inside of the library."

"Remember that!" snapped Drew, squaring his shoulders. "Everybody remember that. It may be important!"

Drew pressed Delaney aside. He seized the gold knob and turned it slowly. He waited for a moment. Nothing sounded save the loud breathing of the butler and the other servants who were crowded in the hall.

The detective jerked open the splintered door.

He hesitated and listened. He pressed aside the portières with his left hand as his right fingers coiled over the ugly hilt of a police regulation .44. He advanced into the library, foot by foot. His fingers still coiled the gun's butt. He stood rigid as he reached the fringe of the splendid rug which was under the great table. His sweeping, close-lidded eyes took in the details of the room. He saw the magpie in its cage. The bird's feathers were ruffled. Its head darted in and out the bars with great excitement.

Drew frowned as he noticed a wreath of pale-blue smoke curling under the dome of the rose-light. He sniffed the air with a shrewd intake. A powder explosion of some kind had left a trace. The air, so close and warm, was filled with acrid menace.

The detective removed his hand from the revolver's butt and waved it behind him as a signal to Delaney and the servants to stay where they were. He took one step forward. The white writing paper and envelope from the cemetery company were upon the table. The stump of a half-smoked cigar draped over this table's edge like a gun on a parapet. It was cold and without ash.

The smaller of the two tables was overturned. The whisky bottle and glass lay at the edge of the rug nearest the wall. The telephone trans-

mitter and receiver were upon the hardwood floor, where they had fallen with the butts of two Havana cigars and the ash trays and match boxes.

Stockbridge was crumpled into a twisted knot against the rich wainscoting. His head was half under his left shoulder. His iron-gray hair was singed black over the left ear.

Drew leaned with one hand on the corner of the table and peered downward. He called the magnate's name. He repeated it. He turned toward the doorway. His hand raised. His finger pressed against his lips.

"Stockbridge is dead," he told Delaney, who glided to his side. "He is dead. He was shot to death in this sealed room. I wonder who did it?"

"Ah, Sing!" shrieked the magpie. "Ah, Sing! Ah, Sing!"

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRST CLEWS

THE magpie's words, repeated over and over as Drew and Delaney stood in the room of death, struck both men as a possible clew. It was more than likely that the murderer or the murdered man had shouted something, the moment the shot was fired. This exclamation might have been, "Ah, Sing!" The bird had repeated something it had memorized, or retained in its shallow brain.

"Ah, Sing!" suggested Drew, keenly on the alert. "Ah, Sing, eh? Never forget that! We may need it—later."

"Sounds like a Chinaman," said the operative. "Stockbridge was shot by a Chink!"

"Get busy! Go over the room and look for a possible hiding place. You, butler, stand across that doorway! Don't move from there!" Drew wheeled and stared at the white faces of the servants which were framed in the somber curtains of the opening to the hall.

The detective swung back. He rounded the large table with slow steps. He bent down.

One knee touched the rug. He reached and grasped the magnate's stiff arm. He worked it like a hinge. He felt of the muscles. They were rigid.

Rising, Drew again tested the air of the library. He glanced at Delaney, who was opening the book-case doors.

"What do you smell?" he asked sharply.

The operative turned and sniffed with widening nostrils.

"It's powder!" he said. "Gunpowder, Chief."

"Sure?"

"It's kind-a peculiar—at that."

"Explain yourself—be clear!"

Delaney scratched his head. "I'd say, Chief, it was smokeless powder. It don't smell like the ordinary kind."

"I saw smoke when I came in!"

"That smokeless stuff smokes. It ain't altogether what they call it. Remember the shootin'-gallery at Headquarters? There's smoke there when the police are practicing with them steel-jacketed bullets."

"You're right," said Drew. "Keep on looking about. I'm getting on. Stockbridge was shot at very close range behind and under the left ear. The weapon used was a small-caliber revolver. The bullet is undoubtedly lodged in the lower brain. Powder stains are in his hair.

The opening is clotted shut. He fell forward. In falling he knocked over the little table with its load of ash-trays, match-boxes, telephone, cigar butts and the whisky bottle and the glass. He's been dead some time."

"I 'e'rd no shot!" cried the butler from the doorway.

Drew wheeled. "You wouldn't," he said sharply. "Delaney," he added, "say, Delaney, get out your note book and pencil. I want to put down everything we can think of before I send for the coroner. We'll take a complete record. This thing is diabolical. You see nothing?"

"Nothing," echoed Delaney as he slammed a book-case door shut, dusted his fingers and reached in his pocket. "There's nobody planted in this room—that's a fact, Chief. That's what gets me. How was the murder done?"

"Speculation is useless—now! Get ready for notes."

"I'm ready, Chief."

The detective strode across the library rugs and snapped on the wall switch by jabbing at a mother-of-pearl button. Each time he jabbed, more lights came on. The room flooded with soft glowing from concealed globes. This glow brought out the full details of the palatial interior. Drew chewed at his mustache thoughtfully. He measured the walls with his eyes. He

glided swiftly toward the windows. He thrust aside the heavy curtains of one and glanced upward.

"Closed and locked," he said to Delaney. "Put that down. There's snow on the sill which has drifted through the outer slats. Put that down. No sign of footprints. Put that down. Now, the upper part!"

He climbed up on the ornate radiator box. His fingers went over the catch. "Locked here!" he said, glancing down. "Locked and the same as it was. Make a note of that!"

He sprang down and examined the other window. He went over the sill and the catch with absorbed intentness. His teeth bit against his upper lip. He shook his head as he turned.

"No chance for a bullet to have been fired through these windows!" he declared positively. "No chance at all. This end of the library is sealed as far as we are concerned. Now, we'll consider the only other opening—the door!"

"Double locks, Delaney," he called over his shoulder as he crossed the room and pressed the butler back into the hall. "Double locks of the superior order. Gold knobs and key-holes. The holes are not in line. The chamfering is clean, except where you struck it once or twice with the ax. No sign of outside tampering or jimmy work. I'd say we've covered this door. Any suggestions?"

Delaney tried both the inner lock and the bolt which was actuated with a gold butterfly-wing of heavy construction. He studied the flat key. It was gold-plated. He dropped to his knees and went over the entire lower chamfering with his broad finger.

He said, "No suggestions, Chief. This was locked twice, until we broke a hole through with an ax. I don't see——"

"Make a note of everything!" ordered Drew with a sharp glance at the waiting servants. "Make a full record of what we have found—including your exact interpretation of the magpie's words. What were they?"

"Ah, Sing!"

"I think the same. Let's look the bird over. Perhaps it will repeat."

The two detectives strode to the bird-cage. "I'm going to send for Fosdick and the coroner," said Drew hastily. "We've got to hurry. What do you make of this bird? Could it have had anything to do with the murder?"

The magpie protested against this accusation. Its feathers ruffled. Its claws clamped over the perch. Its tail extended upward and seemed to dart with indignation.

"Ah, Sid!" exclaimed Drew close up to the gilded bars. "Ah, Sid. Ah, Sid!" he repeated as the bird sprang to the bottom of the cage

and set this jumping up and down at the end of the spring.

"No go," said Delaney. "This black parrot don't like our looks."

Drew fingered the cage. He tested the spring. He stooped and glanced underneath. He tapped the belfry. It was of inlaid wood. It rang solid. "No use," he said. "This is all, all right. Let's get to the other matters before the clews get cold. Look everywhere for a possible trap-door or a secret panel. Test the walls. Move the book-cases. Turn the pictures. Lift up the rugs. Then put everything back like you found it. Fosdick will be on the job with both feet and the Homicide Squad, before we know it. We haven't much time." Drew glanced at his watch as Delaney started by moving out one of the book-cases.

The detective ignored the body which lay upon the floor near the little table. He was holding his investigation down to outside facts, and bringing them to bear upon the crux of the matter. In this way, he believed, he would secure better results. He did not want to be blinded by an impossibility at the beginning. His first glance at Stockbridge sufficed to assure him that the lethal instrument which had felled the magnate was not in evidence. The bright light from a score of globes would reveal any such object as a revolver or rifle. No one

of the servants had seen anything. They still were peering into the room like men and women who had lost all they owned. Stockbridge, despite his temper and sins, had been a good master to those who served him without questioning.

Drew glared at his watch for a second time, in preoccupation. He strode to the library door and beckoned a hooked finger toward the butler who towered over the other servants.

"You!" he exclaimed. "You didn't obey orders. You didn't stay where you were told to stay! Why did you leave this door at all?"

"S' 'elp me, sir, I didn't, Mr. Drew. If I did it wasn't farther than the foyer or the downstairs steps. I took very careful pains to call the second-man, sir, when I went after you."

Drew's eyes smoldered with inner fire. "I told you," he repeated, "I told you to stay by this door and not leave it—even for a minute. You went after the second-man, by your own admission. You went to the foyer hall. You went to the staircase leading down to the lower part of the house. In other words, you didn't watch the door, and you lost your master through your own foolishness!"

"But, sir, nobody could 'ave gotten through the door. Hit was locked and bolted on the hinside, sir! I 'e'rd Mr. Stockbridge do that when you left 'im! I did, sir!"

"We may have been mistaken when we thought we heard that! Perhaps he just fumbled with the locks, and left it unlocked." Drew eyed the servant's red face with a keen-lidded glance. He waited.

"That cawn't be right, sir," said the butler, after thought and a wild glance about. " 'Ow can that be right? I tried the door when the telephone loidy called me hup! I tried hit twice. James tried hit! 'E fixes hall the locks in the 'ouse, sir. 'E says it was most excellently secured, sir."

"How about that?" asked Drew, turning to the second-man. "What of that, James?"

" 'E's right. I'm a little of everythin' about the 'ouse. I tends the door and I watches the lights and locks, sir. I was born in Brixton, sir, where the old man kept a lock-shop, sir. That's twenty years, and more ago, sir. Beggin' your pardon, sir."

Drew swung upon the butler. The second-man was the living picture of truth. His dereliction, if any, might consist in sly tapping of the wine-cellar. His nose attested to this habit, in a brilliant rosette.

"You're partly to blame!" Drew told the butler. "There's nobody in this room who could have committed the murder. There was nobody here when we left Mr. Stockbridge. There is no way for anybody to get in, save

through this door. The same applies in getting out—escaping. If you were awake and always here, and if you were honest," he added, "I could presume that the master was slain by—well, let us say, unnatural causes. Such things do not exist. This is a material age. Nothing as much as a pin-head or point was ever moved save through a natural cause. No bullet could be fired into a man's brain without a hand which planned or pulled the trigger."

The butler stared at Drew with blank expression. He gulped. His eyes dropped. "I'm thinking," he said, "that the whole blym occurrence his unnatural. I never left that door until they told me the telephone company's loidy wanted me on the wire. It was then I left it."

"Ah!" said Drew. "We're getting there. Then, if you are speaking truth, and I won't help you if you are not, we have reached a point in the case which will bear considerable thought. It is evident that Stockbridge was murdered by a pistol shot, at or about the time the table and contents were spilled over. In other words, the shot which bowled him over brought down with it the telephone transmitter and receiver. That is the thing which fixes, within minutes—perhaps seconds—the time of the murder. The telephone girl will have a record which will help us considerable. Many criminals have been caught—and convicted by the time element.

There is no alibi against truth! A man can't be in two places at the same time!"

Drew turned toward the door. He hesitated and wheeled.

"You heard nothing fall in this room?" he asked sharply.

"I did not, sir."

"No shot?"

"I cawn't say that I did, sir."

"No telephone bell ringing? Ringing at any time after I left the house?"

"Not downstairs, sir."

"You did!"

" 'Ow, sir?"

"Didn't you tell me the telephone company rang up and wanted you to put the receiver on the hook in the library?"

"I didn't 'ear it ring. James brought the word, sir."

"Then, what happened upstairs?"

" 'Ow do you know, sir? 'Ow'd you know it rang up there!"

"By elimination! It rang then, in Loris' room? You said 'nothing downstairs' in such a way I presume it rang upstairs."

The butler stroked his chin. It was blue and close-shaved. The purple of his cheeks and neck had deepened. He glanced about the hallway. His eyes wandered toward the grand stairway which coiled upward to the second

story. "I'm 'iding nothing, sir," he said. "Miss Loris often is called up at night. She's very popular, sir. I 'e'rd 'er telephone ringing once or twice while I was standing by this door, waiting for the master to come out—which 'e never did."

Drew hesitated. He plucked out his watch and glanced at the dial. He turned swiftly. "Stay right there," he said as he parted the portières and faced Delaney who wore the puzzled expression of a man baffled and entirely at sea.

"What did you find?" he snapped to the operative.

"Not a thing, Chief." Delaney mopped his brow with his sleeve. "Nothing at all!" he added. "Everything regular. Modern—very modern house! Thick, new, fireproof, soundproof, million-dollar building. No trapdoors or panels. No loose boards. No hole in the ceiling. No nothing to hang a ghost on. The gunman who shot Stockbridge went right up in blue smoke, Chief. I quit!"

Drew glided around the table and kneeled by the magnate's body. His swift, light-fingered touch went through the trousers and vest. The pockets he turned inside out. The watch attracted his attention. Its dial had been cracked by the fall. A splinter of glass pressed against the minute hand. He rose with a low cry. He

pressed the repeater and listened to the time chimes. He counted the strokes. He had a test in a million. Had the watch been tampered with by the murderer, the chimes would have proved a lie. It was possible to set the hands to any position. It would be difficult to change both the hands and the repeater.

"Delaney!" he said with his dark eyes glowing, "we've got the exact time of the murder. As I told the butler—it is very important. Both, chimes and hands, show that Stockbridge was shot at four minutes and eighteen seconds past midnight—this morning! This is a fine watch. It cost several thousand dollars. Robbery was not the motive. An ordinary crook, and they're all ordinary—with few exceptions—would have taken this timepiece."

"That's all right," said Delaney with a quick frown. "That's fine, Chief, but—but how did that exceptional—crook get into this room? How did he get out? That's what I want to know!"

Drew combed his fingers through his black hair. He described a complete circle about the library, with his eyes taking in everything, before he faced Delaney.

"I don't know!" he said frankly. "I don't want to think of it, either. We'll turn the case over to other men for the time. Let them do

some thinking. I believe we have secured everything we want."

The detective dropped his glance to the telephone receiver upon the floor at Stockbridge's elbow. He stooped, grasped the silk-insulated cord, and fished it up.

"I'll try to get Central," he said. "This has been off a long while. She may have sent the trouble-man again."

Drew worked the hook of the 'phone up and down. He was answered after a short wait. The girl's surprised voice at hearing life at the end of a dead set of wires was drowned in the detective's request to get him, "Spring 3100 —quickly!"

"Hello! Hello!" said Drew as he got the connection. "Hello! Is this Spring 3100? It is? Who's talking? . . . Jones? This you, Jones? . . . Say, Jones, plug me in on the Fifth Deputy Commissioner's private house wire! . . . Sir? . . . I don't care! . . . This is Drew talking. . . . Drew! . . . D — r — e — w! . . . That's right . . . Drew, of Drew's Agency!"

The Detective turned. He eyed Delaney who was searching the floor about the millionaire's up-turned shoes. He tapped the receiver against the transmitter's silver-plated edge. His eyes lifted. His lips hardened as the diaphragm of the receiver vibrated harshly.

"Hello!" he answered tersely. "Hello! This

you, Commissioner? Is this Fosdick? . . . This is Drew talking. Yes! . . . Drew. . . . Yes! I say, Fosdick, there's been a murder committed at Stockbridge's. . . . You know—the munitions magnate! . . . The millionaire! . . . Morphy's old partner."

Drew waited a moment. He dropped his eyes upon the body below him.

"Yes!" he continued into the transmitter. "Yes, Fosdick. I hear better, now. Yes—Stockbridge is dead! . . . He's stone dead! He was shot down in cold blood! . . . Yes! . . . Shot in the brain. . . . Yes! Send your best operatives. . . . Yes! . . . Send a finger-print man and photographer. You'll need 'em! . . . Yes! . . . Yes! . . . Shot with a small-bore revolver, I guess! . . . Wound behind ear looks like it! What? . . . No! . . . Room was bolted. . . . He was inside. . . . Butler on guard. . . . Windows closed and locked! . . . No! . . .No! . . . No! . . . It wasn't suicide. He was threatened twice, this time! . . . By letter and telephone call. . . . What? . . . What? . . . No! . . . He didn't shoot himself! . . . There's no gun. It's on the left side—close up! . . . Hair is singed . . . flesh is powder spotted. . . . Burned? . . . Yes. . . . You'll be right up? . . . Yes! . . . I'll be waiting! . . . Come! . . . come——"

Drew lowered the receiver and clicked it upon

the hook of the telephone which stood on the hardwood floor. He slowly turned toward the open doorway of the library. The servants had drawn back and out of sight. Delaney leaned forward with both hands on his bent knees. A girl's voice had sounded in the mansion. It came closer. The portières parted with a silken sweep. Drew braced himself against the larger table. His hand went back to his hip. It dropped to his side. He stared across the flood of light with line-drawn eyelids.

Loris Stockbridge, gowned in lace chiffon and cloaked with ermine and sable, glided across the rugs and stood framed beneath the soft, rose-light of the central dome. Her dusk-black eyes burned and blazed like flame through tinder smoke as she confronted the detective.

Clasped in the fingers of her jewelless right hand was a tiny, ivory-handled revolver.

"What are all these people doing here?" she asked hysterically.

CHAPTER SIX

"HARRY NICHOLS"

DETECTIVE TRIGGY DREW flushed slightly beneath his olive skin. He bowed, with his keen eyes fixed upon the little, ivory-handled revolver clutched so tightly in Loris Stockbridge's right hand. He bowed for a second time. His eyes lifted and his brows arched as he said distinctly:

"Miss Stockbridge, something very serious has happened to your father. It happened in this library. It happened this morning. Won't you please go back upstairs to your rooms until I call for you. At present I am in charge of matters."

"Matters? What do you mean?"

The girl swayed slightly. She glanced down at the revolver as if she were unaware that it was in her hand. Drew advanced a step in her direction. He feared a woman and a gun more than anything else in the world. Both were liable to form a dangerous combination.

"Something happened," he repeated. "I'm very sorry for you, Miss Stockbridge."

"Happened!" she exclaimed. "Happened to him? You don't mean that letter—that telephone call—do you?"

Loris' splendid, dusky eyes, within the depths of which high lights shone, wandered over the polished table. They fastened upon the envelope from the cemetery company. They fixed where the letter lay with one corner beneath the center piece. They lifted in thought. They swung toward the waiting detective who had placed himself between her and the body of her father. She divined this movement with quick intuition. She stepped to one side and bent downward with a graceful movement of her hips. She gasped and pointed a left hand finger, which wavered and went up to her hair as her palm pressed against the side of her head. She started sobbing—short, throaty sobs of poignant distress.

"Please don't," whispered Drew holding out a guarding arm. "Please don't, Miss Stockbridge. Your father is beyond this earth. You should not have come down here."

"Dead?"

The word came from the depths of a soul. "Dead?" she repeated with her taper fingers spreading across her face.

"Yes, Miss," said Drew with a catch in his voice. "Yes, he is quite dead. He was slain in this room by a revolver shot which struck be-

hind and under his left ear. No one was in the library when he locked himself in, save himself. No one was here when we broke the door down. And, save his servants and you, no one was in this house. He was——"

"Murdered!" Loris' voice had lifted to one wild shriek of final conviction and grief. She swayed. Her knees bent beneath her skirt and bulged outwardly. She sank into a slow faint at the detective's feet. She pillowed her head upon the rug. A silence followed.

Drew stooped, after a glance at the servants in the doorway, thrust his body as a barrier, and reached along Loris' white arm until his hand closed over the barrel of the little revolver. He untwisted her cold fingers, and palmed the weapon under a shielding cuff. He rose, saying to Delaney, who had hurried forward:

"I'll take charge of this."

"Sure, Chief. Plant it. She didn't have it."

"She had it all right, but—we'll suspend judgment. You and the butler carry her upstairs. Go easy. Her bedroom is on the third floor, I think. That's the reason she didn't come down, sooner. Perhaps, well, I say, she didn't hear us breaking down the door. We are her agents in this matter, now. Remember that, and say nothing to anybody. I'll do the talking."

Drew dropped his hand into his side pocket. It came out without the revolver but with a handkerchief between his fingers. He mopped his brow gracefully, then replaced the handkerchief. The motion was a natural one.

He followed Delaney and the butler with their soft burden as far as the first steps of the stairway. He turned and strode back to the doorway leading into the library. He faced about in this. He eyed the servants, who lowered their heads beneath his accusing scrutiny. Focusing his gaze to a searching squint he tried to single out a culprit from their midst. There seemed to be none. Each face was terror-lined and drawn. Each seemed to want to avoid his direct glance. None of all of them faced him with boldness or assurance. It was as he expected things to be. There was no evidence shown in the case that the servants of the Stockbridge régime had ever threatened the master. They were old, tried and trusted. They had the faults of their kind. These faults only served to strengthen Drew's opinion that the murderer of the magnate had struck from the outside, without benefit of inside information. The letter and the telephone call were foreign. A note, pinned upon the millionaire's pillow, would have been more effective. Nothing had been tried like that. This proved to Drew that

he could eliminate the servants, for the time being.

"Which one of you is the valet?" he asked with final resolve.

"I am, sir!"

Drew ran his eyes over an aged man in white vest and tight-fitting clothes which were studded here and there with gold-plated buttons. The fit of the stockings—the neatness of the low patent-leather shoes—the smartness and aloofness of the individual, caused the detective to smile slightly. The man was better dressed than his master.

"Your native country is Germany?" said Drew.

"It was, sir."

"No, it is yet. You can't change that part of it. When did you come to the United States?"

"Fourteen—fifteen years ago, sir. The master brought me from England where I was employed by the Right Honorable Arthur Sandhurst, sir."

"You are now a naturalized American?"

"Going on thirteen years, sir."

"Come down to my office about noon to-morrow. I want to speak to you then. I haven't time now. Be sure you bring that magpie with you." Drew turned and jerked his thumb to-

ward the front of the library. "Do you understand?"

"I do, sir!"

"That's all!" exclaimed the detective. "One of you may stand by the door until Mr. Delaney returns. The rest may go downstairs. Remember, no talking to anybody but accredited police officers, who will soon be here."

"I'll stand guard!" announced the second-man with a pompous voice. "Nobody'll get by me, sir. I'll 'ave them know I'm right 'ere, sir."

Drew backed through the curtains as the second-man was speaking. He dropped them behind him and started another search, which was done in solitude and in silence. He went over everything in the library with the trained eyes of an operative who had learned his profession in many schools. He left deduction and surmise for a later hour. He was after cold facts which might lead to an answer to the riddle. He held, with some slight scorn, the theory of the armchair detective and the puzzle worked out by retrospection. His experience had been, that only through hard work could he expect to find his answer. He had been credited with visiting six hundred laundries in search of a certain mark. He had a note book filled with his failures to find the man he was after. The men he had found caused him no concern whatsoever.

They had gone to prison and closed their accounts with him.

He applied hard work over the minutes to the case at hand. He went over the body of the aged millionaire. He took scrapings of the blood stains on the floor. He scratched up some few atoms of dried whisky. He examined the bottle. He searched each square inch under and about the body. He went through Stockbridge's pockets and beneath his vest. He tried everything in the way of getting facts which might bear on the case. A tapemeasure furnished certain distances which were recorded upon the back of an envelope. His data was complete, insofar as he had time to go. He desired to spend at least twelve hours in the library. This could not be. The case would be taken from his hands within minutes. Already there was a stir in the front part of the house. The bell had been ringing for some time. Delaney and the butler had hastened forward to answer it.

"The Central Office bunch!" announced the operative, parting the curtains and staring in at Drew. "Here they are, Chief!"

The detective stepped briskly out of the room and glided through the foyer hall to the front door. Here Delaney joined him, as steps were heard coming up from the servants' quarters as well as outside. It was as if a raid were in progress.

"Brass band methods!" said Drew. "You get out, Delaney, and go to our taxi. Stay there! I want to speak to Fosdick."

The door opened. A burly form blotted out the light from the Avenue and stamped in, shaking the snow from his overcoat. It was Fosdick—Chief of Detectives.

"Hello," he said cuttingly. "Hello, Drew! What's this you've been giving me over the 'phone?"

The detective drew Fosdick aside and allowed five Central Office men to stream into the hallway.

"Go and see," he suggested into the detective's ear. "Go and see. I've left everything just as I found it. The body is still there. The servants have been kept in the house. Question them. I'm off, now. 'Phone me not later than eight this morning. I'll be at my office. I'm acting in a private capacity. I'm protecting Loris Stockbridge—the sole heir!"

"Protecting!" exclaimed Fosdick. "What d'ye mean?"

Drew dropped his hand to his pocket and crammed down the little ivory-handled revolver. "Well," he smiled broadly. "You know what I mean. She's alone in this world—save for her friends. The old man called me in the case. I'm still in the case—remember that!"

Fosdick gulped hard. "All right," he said,

turning and peeling off his coat. "I'll soon get to the bottom of this! Case looks easy to me. It's suicide! That's all it ever could be!"

Drew found his hat and coat where the butler had hung them. He went out through the front door without answering Fosdick. He crossed the Avenue on a diagonal which brought him to the waiting taxi where Delaney stood muffled to the chin. The two men climbed upon the running-board. The driver started up with a jerk, from his frozen position in the snow. They rounded the block and stopped in front of the drug-store where Loris had met the officer.

The Central Office man who had taken O'Toole's place had little to report. O'Toole had vanished toward the south. When last seen he was close on the heels of the man in olive-drab.

"Come on, Delaney," said Drew at this information. "We'll walk over to Fifth Avenue and then downtown. The driver can pick up our men in the alley. I want to clear my head of this muddle. A walk will do it!"

Delaney fell in behind his chief. They turned the corner. They struck through a side street and westward. They saw ahead of them the white expanse of untrodden snow, and beyond this the faint blue barricade of the Palisades.

The hour was after three. The crisp underfooting brought wine to their cheeks. The grip

of winter air cleared both men's heads like a draught of ether. They stepped out. Their shoulders went back. Their thoughts passed from the case at the mansion to other things. The night had been filled with a thousand disappointments. Greatest of these was the stabbing memory that they both had been picked by the multimillionaire to protect him and save him from his enemies. They had failed in this trust. Their patron lay dead, and somewhere a whispering voice chuckled over a victory.

"Fifth Avenue!" announced Drew as they reached the corner. "Now, downtown, Delaney," he added cheerily. "Old Kris Kringle has nothing on us to-night. I believe we're the only ones out."

The operative caught his chief's humor, and glanced into his face with a smile. "Whew!" he breathed. "Whew!" he repeated from the depths of his lungs. "I'm glad, Triggy, to get from that damn house and that damn magpie and that——"

"So am I!" said Drew, thrusting out his hand and linking his elbow into the cove of Delaney's arm. "So am I. Fine night for the poor firm of Drew and Company."

Delaney glanced around and over his left shoulder. He blinked with frosty lids as he saw the towering façades of Stockbridge's mansion; its turrets and towers spiraled in the win-

ter sky. He drew in his lips and compressed them. He puffed them out as he turned.

"I'm deducting," he said, "that there's more at the bottom of this thing than we think. Put it down for me that the Germans are mixed up in it."

Drew walked on for a block before he answered. He gripped the operative's arm by closing his own as he said:

"Quit deducting! It's fatal! Get your facts! Get all of them. The answer will come then, without an effort. It will be the right answer or none at all."

"Just the same, Chief——"

"The trouble with you," broke in Drew severely, "the trouble is, that you are forcing a conclusion to meet your own suspicions. The Germans, with the exception of a small clique, are behaving very well in this country at the present time. In other words, the most of them are good Americans and sane."

"That walley-sham?"

"He is not even under consideration! Did you notice him?"

"Sure, Chief!"

"Anything strike you as peculiar?"

"N—o."

"There were tears in his eyes—the only ones shed in that house for Stockbridge—outside of the daughter."

Delaney gulped. "I didn't see them," he said frankly.

"No! Well, I did—and when he wasn't expecting me to see them. A woman is never wholly lost who can blush, or a man who can shed tears."

"Sounds like good deduction," admitted the operative. "But then, Chief, there are a lot of fine actors in this world. I think there has been some in this case."

"This case, Delaney," Drew said, "is like many others which appear at first impossible of solving. All things can be solved by first principles. Give me all the facts and I'll give you the answer to any riddle. The answer will come! Don't try to write your plot until you have words to form your story. Don't make the mistake of forcing an answer to father a wish. In other words, Delaney, best of friends, we haven't all the facts we are going to get in this case and therefore it is idle to attempt to deduce who shot Stockbridge!"

"Or how he was shot, Chief?"

"It's almost the same thing. Both answers will come with hard work and plenty of it. We must keep along the main stem. Truth is a tree with many branches. It rises from the roots named cause, and reaches the top called effect. It springs from motive up to crime in one straight stem. We must trim away the branches

and the false-work, and then we can see the trunk."

"There's one I'd like to trim right now," said Delaney, pausing in his snow-caked stride.

"Which one?" asked Drew.

"That noise in the library like a cat getting its tail twisted."

"I can explain that!"

"It's been driving me to drink, Chief."

"The telephone company, Delaney, have a device they call a howler. They cut this device in on the wire when a receiver is left off the hook. It is simply a high-frequency current generated for the purpose of vibrating the receiver's diaphragm until somebody hears the noise and puts the receiver back on the hook."

"It's a howler, all right, Chief!"

"Oftentimes a book or magazine gets under a receiver and lifts it up an inch or more. This attracts the attention of the central operator who thinks somebody is trying to get a number. When the situation is clear to her that the receiver is off the hook, or that the circuit is closed without anybody being at the receiver end, she notifies the wire-captain or chief-operator. It was either one or the other who put the howler on after Stockbridge was shot and the 'phone had fallen to the floor. Is that satisfactory? Does that explain the noise we heard in the library before we broke down the door?"

"I see now, Chief. I thought all along it was spirits like the rest of the job. Outside of spirits, what is the answer to the things that happened in that house? I know it. I deduct it, Chief. The old man was expecting somebody all of the time. He let this somebody into the library when the butler wasn't looking. Maybe it was a woman, for all we know. Maybe a German spy. Maybe anybody. This somebody got in an argument with him over spoils on some deal, and shot him dead. That's my idea, Chief!"

"You've missed your profession, Delaney. You've disgraced the firm! How did the library door get locked on the inside? How did that happen? Did Stockbridge, shot through the brain, rise and do it? It was mighty well locked—you remember!"

"I never thought of that," admitted the operative. "Then it looks, Chief, as if it was a case of suicide."

"Fosdick said the same thing without having many facts. How could a right-handed man shoot himself behind the left ear? How could he do a thing like that and then get rid of the weapon without leaving a trace of it? How—oh, well, get facts and you won't ask such questions!"

"Then it was done by an outsider?" blurted Delaney, staring through the wind-blown snow

which came off the housetops. "It was done by the fellow who 'phoned and wrote that letter, or had the letter written? I don't see how he could do it!"

Drew smiled at Delaney's candor. "Neither do I," he said simply. "But we've crossed Forty-second Street and we're on the trail by everyday, up-to-date methods which never fail if they are continued long enough and men work hard enough. We'll start with Harry Nichols—the man in olive-drab! I've his address!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

"THE SPOT OF BLACK"

DELANEY stepped behind his chief and followed in single file as the detective swung from the Avenue at Thirty-ninth Street and turned toward the east on the uptown side of the thoroughfare.

The snow had ceased falling from out the leaden sky. A roar came to them of the awakening city which was stirring in its last sleep. A tug whistled hoarsely somewhere on the East River. Its blare and signal echoed down the towering canyon. An answering rattle sounded from the Elevated. A milk wagon churned by. A deep-seagoing hansom-cab, of the vintage of ten years before, struggled along Madison Avenue as the two detectives paused on the corner and sought a pathway through the snow to the opposite side.

"Some night," said the operative, pulling down his derby hat and facing Drew. "A hell of-a night to be out. Good thing we walked, though. My head is clearing."

"It needed clearing," said the detective.

"Some of your deductions were impossible. Whom do you suppose we're going to meet here?"

"How should I know, Chief?"

"Guess!"

"Harry Nichols."

"Who else?"

"Search me, Chief."

"Who's that over across the street in the shelter of the stoop? See! He sees us! You ought to know who that is!"

"He looks familiar," admitted Delaney.

"It's O'Toole!"

"That's right, Chief. It is! He tailed the lad in the fur benny from the drug-store and came here. The lad in the drug-store was Harry Nichols. The thing works out all right."

"Get over to the other side of the street and tell O'Toole that he can go home and get some sleep. Tell him to be at the office not later than eight o'clock—this morning. Get what information you can from him. This brownstone house with the sign out is our address. I'll wait on the stoop."

Delaney was over in three minutes. "All right," he said cheerfully. "O'Toole says that Nichols left the drug-store and walked south. Trail led to Fred's Old English Chop House where Nichols drank a split of mineral water and had a chop with a potato. He 'phoned twice

before leaving. O'Toole don't know where to. The booth was sound-proof and all the lad did was to drop coins. He left a piece of paper in the booth. O'Toole got it. Here it is, Chief."

Drew slanted a torn portion of envelope and studied its surface. He deciphered a scrawling handwriting into the words, "Loris, Loris, Gramercy Hill, Attorney Denman of Cedar Street, will consult with him in morning. . . . Drew's Detective Agency . . . look out."

"Umph!" said Drew, pocketing the scrap of paper with a thoughtful frown. "That last may be a warning. Again it could be a mere notation. What else did O'Toole find, Delaney?"

"That's all, except that he put the boy to bed here at about one o'clock. There's a 'phone in Nichols' apartment. O'Toole sneaked up the stairs and heard it ringing. He had to come down for fear of queering things. He said that's all, chief."

The detective turned and entered the storm-door. He struck a match and, shielding it with his hands, searched the names over the mail-boxes. A neat card, set in well-polished bronze, indicated, "Harry E. Nichols, Apartment Three."

"He keeps this place all of the time," said Drew, jabbing at the button. "He's down on furlough or Government business. Nice place, this," he added as the inner door-lock clicked

and he thrust his foot forward. "Looks like about two hundred a month. This is exclusively bachelor!"

"Them bachelor apartments," said Delaney with candor as he glided into the hallway. "Them places like this ain't what they seem. There's some big parties pulled off in them. I remembers——"

"Sisst!" warned Drew, clutching the operative's arm. "Easy," he whispered. "Come on. Somebody is waiting upstairs for us. See his head in the light by the banister. Same chap, ain't it?"

"Can't see, Chief. Might be!"

"Nice house," commented Drew as his feet sank in a deep-blue hall carpet. "Good ornaments and fixtures throughout the place. Nice house! Just about what I'd expected. Here we are. I'll do the talking."

A blond pompadour, under which was a pair of wide gray eyes that blinked at them, greeted the two detectives as they turned the last landing. A thick-lipped mouth, in which was considerable strength and determination, opened and revealed a double row of strong, young teeth that would have delighted an Army recruiting sergeant.

"Well, what do you gentlemen want at this hour of the morning?"

Drew squared his shoulders and pressed Delaney back a foot or more.

"Harry Nichols?" he asked brusquely.

"Yes, I'm Harry Nichols."

"Miss Stockbridge's friend?"

The gray eyes widened perceptibly. The lids dropped in heavy calculation. "Who are you?" the young man asked pointblankly. "I don't believe I ever had the pleasure of meeting either of you gentlemen." Nichols glanced into Delaney's leaning face which was just over his chief's shoulder.

"No, you haven't," said Drew softening his tone. "We've never met, but we may see considerable of each other. Here's my card!"

Nichols took the card, tilted it to the light from the open door, then dropped it into the right-hand side pocket of his lounging robe beneath which blue pajamas showed.

"Come in!" he said without committing himself. "Come in, and take off your hats. I've only two rooms and a bath, here."

Drew stepped upon heavy rugs and crossed the chamber to a chair. He turned this, removed his hat, and sat down with his legs thrust outward. His eyes roamed the place in slow calculation. Dark, old masters, which were probably good in their day, stared down at him. A little globe, petticoated in soft silk, gave a yellow light to the walls and floor. It brought

out Nichols' features in sharp, actinic shadows. Drew continued his searching glance. A bed, with tossed coverlet and sheets, loomed from an inner room. A table, upon which was an officer's cap and gloves, stood between two doors that were closed. One of these doors, Drew concluded, was the bathroom entrance, the other might have been a closet. His eyes fastened finally upon a telephone upon a dark-wood stand. He lifted his chin.

"Montgomery Stockbridge is dead!" he snapped, darting at Harry Nichols the keen scrutiny of a man salvoing a surprise.

Nichols glanced at the 'phone. "I know that!" he said with rising color. "I'm aware of that fact, Mr. Drew."

"When did you first learn of it?"

"See here! I have your card. I know who you are. I was almost expecting you, or another detective. But,"—Nichols' voice raised to a determined key—"but, sir, I am not talking to anybody about what you just told me. How do I know who you represent—the police or the law or the——"

"You have talked with Miss Stockbridge. She told you in the drug-store that I was in the house. She has told you that I was called in by her father. She undoubtedly 'phoned you, after she recovered from her faint. You have the details of the dastardly murder—if ever

there was one! I represent her. I represent her friends. I have no other interest in this case!"

Harry Nichols drew out the card and studied it. He glanced at Delaney. "Who is this man?" he asked.

"My right bower. He's with me—and you and Miss Loris. We're together in this. The police now have the case. What I want is to protect you and her from the police. What will they do when they learn from the servants—which they will—that Miss Stockbridge had *this* gun in her hand when she entered the library?"

Drew extended his palm. In the hollow of it lay the little ivory-handled revolver which he had taken from Loris.

"What are they going to do when they learn about this?" he asked with shrewd reasoning. "Particularly, Mr. Nichols, when the caliber of this revolver is probably the same caliber of the bullet which entered, and is still in, Mr. Stockbridge's brain."

The gray eyes narrowed. The lips compressed until they were white. They seemed drawn with pain. A faint hiss of surprise sounded in the room. Harry Nichols turned and strode to an ornate mantel-piece upon which was a single cabinet photo. He lifted it impulsively. He stared at the picture of Loris Stockbridge as if in it lay inspiration and re-

solve. He set the photo down and wheeled upon Drew. His eyes blazed.

"If you have no connection in this case, save as an adviser," he said clearly and from his heart, "why are you trying to trap me or her? Are all detectives alike? Would they rather see a man in jail than free?"

Drew closed his fingers over the little revolver. He glanced upward at Delaney's towering bulk which was near the doorway leading to the outer hall. This door was the only way out of the apartment. The detective gave no signal to the operative. His fingers uncoiled and revealed a thumb pressing upon the silver-plated barrel from which the leaden noses of six bullets showed as he turned it.

"You are wrong," he said with simple naïveté. "You wrong me in this matter. The affair at Stockbridge's will sooner or later bring you in contact with the Police Department's Detective Bureau. Fosdick, the district attorney, the coroner, may want to interview you. The servants, the newspapers, idle tongues will connect your name with that of Loris Stockbridge. This connection, taking in the fact that she had a revolver of the same caliber as was used to slay her father, may cause trouble. I want——"

"How do you know it's the same revolver—the same caliber?"

There was a stubborn defense in the young man's tones which somewhat pleased the detective. It promised loyalty.

"It may not be the same revolver," Drew said softly. "It may be that the murder was not committed with a revolver. A rifle, held close to a man's brain, would make the same kind of mark and burns. I do know this, however, that the opening in Mr. Stockbridge's head is the same size as my leadpencil—which I have measured and found to be under a quarter-inch. It would seem then that twenty-two caliber might fit the wound. I know of no other caliber very close to it."

"An army rifle," suggested Delaney from the doorway.

"It is larger," said Nichols with a quick frown. "The modified Lee-Enfields, which we are now using, have a greater bore than the British or German rifles. They are about .30 caliber."

"Whatever the case," Drew said, "we must get to our first question. I'm trying to find the truth and protect Miss Stockbridge from the police in case she is suspected. Whose revolver is this? Who does it belong to? How came she to have it so soon after meeting you in the corner drug-store? Did she request it? Perhaps you will clear these points and allow me to go ahead."

"Before I answer your questions, Mr. Drew, before I say anything at all, I would rather have a talk with Miss Loris. You see, we are too good friends to act apart. I'll answer for her. She is innocent! She is too good, too pure to have anything to do with it. She never shot the old—Mr. Stockbridge."

"He threw you out of the house on one occasion."

Harry Nichols clenched his fists. "I'll do the same to you!" he exclaimed. "This is my apartment. What right have you got coming here and accusing Loris? I don't care who you are!"

"Good!" said the detective, rising and stepping forward. "You said just what I wanted you to say. And you said it like a man who can wear an American uniform. Shake hands!"

Harry Nichols did not exactly brighten under the professional flattery. He held out his fingers, however. Drew clasped his hand after transferring the revolver to his left palm. He twirled it as he stepped backward. "Clean," he said. "It don't seem to have been used for some time. But then, who knows? A gun can be wiped and polished,—even in the barrel,—in a very few minutes."

Drew glanced at Nichols with a silent question in his eyes. Delaney had already sized Nichols up as a very clever young man. He

was not far wrong, as he learned when the detective's spoken question was shot through determined lips.

"Nichols," said Drew, "did you lend Miss Stockbridge this revolver? Is it yours? I shall have to turn it over to the police sooner or later. They will trace it by the number."

"Is it fully loaded?"

Drew turned the barrel with his broad thumb. He clicked the mechanism. He broke it and held it out.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, it's fully loaded. This is still a merry whirl for six!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive, Nichols!"

The soldier's face cleared like a lake from a storm. He beamed upon Drew. He smiled for a second time. He pointed toward the chair which the detective had quitted. "Sit down," he said, "and make yourself at home. This is a temperance dugout, but I've got some real good soft stuff—grape juice or club soda. Which will you have?"

"I'll take a cigar," said Delaney.

Drew allowed a smile to creep over his lips. He waited as Harry Nichols dipped into a kitchenette, then came back with three glasses of soda and a huge black Havana.

"Smoke up," he said good-naturedly to De-

laney. "Light up and take a chair. It's daybreak, isn't it?"

"Yes, time we're going," said Drew, setting his empty glass upon the offered tray. "We'll go in a minute. Now, as I told you and as you can see, this revolver is fully loaded. It looks clean. I suppose you lent it to Miss Stockbridge without any empty cartridges. These are the ordinary lead kind which can be secured at any hardware store. You've got some here, perhaps."

"None here. They're all up at Plattsburg. We do some target shooting at times. These little revolvers don't make much noise. You can use them most anywhere."

"That's satisfactory," said Drew, watching the glow of Delaney's cigar. "That's all right. Now, when she 'phoned for the gun or you suggested that she better have one with her, what did she say about the cemetery letter or the threat over the wire? Did she fear anything else? Was that her sole reason for having a revolver with her?"

"You cannot expect me to answer for Miss Stockbridge, Mr. Drew. She is available. You can talk to her. You represent her. I shall not say anything concerning her. She is sacred. The revolver was not discharged. It is the same as when I gave it to her in the drug-store.

Therefore, I'll trouble you for it. It's mine. I admit that."

Drew rose from the chair. His left hand went out. His fingers clasped Harry Nichols' shoulder with a fatherly pressure.

"I'm going now," he said. "I'll leave the gun with you. If the police want it, give it to them. Perhaps they will never hear of it. I doubt if more than one or two servants saw it in Miss Loris' hand when she came into the library. They may not tell Fosdick. He'll try to rough-shod over them. He may arrest the entire household—including Loris. That's his way. It's effective, but it's not my way. Now is there anything that you want to say to me which will clear your mind of this affair?"

Nichols glanced from Drew's clean-cut face. His eyes rested upon the telephone. "I'm going to call her up presently," he said. "I'll talk with her. I'll tell her that you were here—that you left the little revolver—that you stand ready to swear it was clean and fully loaded. Then, when I hear what she has to say about everything, I shall call you up. Is that satisfactory, Mr. Drew?"

The detective turned the revolver in his palm and pressed it forward. "Take it," said he, "and keep it under cover. I'm off with Mr. Delaney. Thanks for the club soda."

"And the cigar," added the big operative as he opened the door.

Drew hesitated on the landing. He turned and went back. Nichols stood by the banisters. The soft light from inside clear-cut the officer's figure like a statue.

"You can do me a favor," said the detective in a whisper. "A damn nice little favor."

"What is it?"

"Have you an extra photo of the girl-in-the-case. One that's laying around somewhere. I don't mean the one on the mantel."

"What do you want it for?"

"For myself. I admire that young lady."

Harry Nichols disappeared through the doorway. He returned within a minute with a cabinet-size photo upon the front of which was written, "From Loris, January '18," in the vertical chirography much practiced by social buds.

"Thanks," said Drew unbuttoning his overcoat and thrusting the photo within his breast. "I shall keep and cherish this, as one of my most sacred possessions. Congratulations, young man!"

The detective's words rang sincere. Nichols flushed. He stammered an answer as Drew hurried down the carpeted steps and joined Delaney at the storm-door.

"Chief," said the operative as they reached the sidewalk and turned toward Madison Ave-

nue. "Chief, why didn't you pump that lad about Stockbridge. You didn't ask him a thing about the old man."

"Unethical to a client," reproved Drew linking arm with the operative. "Come on! We must hurry! I've an idea—which is a very strange thing for a New York detective to have—that Harry Nichols, if he stays in town on furlough, will represent Loris in all matters. I don't know where she could find a better counselor. He's a clam! He told us nothing!"

"Wise boy, Chief! Only fools and women talk to detectives."

"Umph!" said Drew at this sally. "Umph! Well, come on. It's quit snowing. It's daybreak over there in the east and I think the clouds will clear before it gets much later. You——"

"Say, Chief!" exclaimed Delaney clutching the detective's shoulder and wheeling him around. "Say, stand right there a minute. Right in that light. What's that on your chin? Right under the tip of your left ear. Turn around a little more!"

Drew raised his left hand and rubbed it across his face. He pinched the lobe of his ear between his thumb and index finger. He whistled with frosty amazement as he eyed his nail and thumb.

"What to blazes!" he said. "What's that?"

"Turn around! Right under this arc light. Say, Chief, how did you get that spot of black on your neck? You've smeared it all over your collar."

"I don't know. What's it look like?"

"Soot!"

"Soot?"

"Sure, Chief. Lampblack or soot!"

Drew arched his dark brows as he rubbed his finger-tips together. He held them up to the stronger light. He turned and glanced back through the silent walls of the street down which they had walked. He took one step toward the east.

"Hold on!" said Delaney. "Where are you going?"

"Going back!"

"Why, Chief!"

"Smell that stuff! Smell it!" Drew thrust his fingers under Delaney's wrinkled nose. "Smell it, good and strong!" he snapped bitterly. "What is it?"

"By God, Chief, it's powder, I smell! Gunpowder, it is!"

"Umph! I must have gotten it from that gat!"

"You couldn't, Chief. That gun was polished up like a whistle. Besides, how would the spot come to be under your left ear?"

Drew furrowed his brow. He swung in the

snow with new decision. "Come on!" he said. "We'll think this over! I didn't see any soot on that gat. I don't know where I got it either. Could it have been there for some time?"

"Sure, Chief. I just happened to notice it. Light's bright." Delaney nodded toward the arc.

"Did you get a good look at my face in Stockbridge's?"

"Can't say that I did, Chief. I was too busy with that howler thing and that magpie and that murder, to see anything. You might of got it there without me noticing it. It wasn't there in the taxicab. I'll swear to that."

Drew passed his fingers across his nostrils like a man sampling perfume. He repeated the motion. He scraped some of the powder from his nails with a pocket knife and dropped the sample into the crease of an envelope which he carefully folded and crammed into his pocket.

"I'll have that analyzed," he said, as they turned toward Fifth Avenue. "Another trifle in a chain of circumstance. Think it over, Delaney. It resembles and smells like powder which has been burnt. You hurry along home. Be at the office no later than nine. I'll keep on down Fifth Avenue to the Flatiron Building. I want to walk and clear my head. I'll get some coffee, pie and rolls, at an all-night restaurant. I'll take time for a shave, shine and shampoo.

Perhaps I'll jump into a Turkish bath to finish up and get ready for work."

"You're not going to bed at all?"

"Not until I find out who murdered Stockbridge!"

"Or how he was murdered?" said Delaney, with a puzzled frown as he turned to go.

"If I get the murderer, I'll find out how he did it!" snapped Drew, with a parting glance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"TANGLED WIRES"

IT was five minutes before nine when Delaney reached the ornate entrance to the skyscraper wherein were the offices of Drew's Agency.

He wandered into the express elevator, yawned a "eighteen, out" signal to the elevator pilot and stepped from the cage with the general air of a man who had spent a hard night without getting anywhere in particular.

Stopping in the operatives' room for a few minutes, he picked up scraps of news concerning the case at Stockbridge's! There was a report, moreover, that an extra was expected by ten o'clock. The air of desertion about the suite told Delaney plainer than words that most of the operatives were upon the case. The entire corps, with few exceptions, had been working hard while he slept. The telephone-girl and the assistant-manager, Harrigan, wound up each of his questions by a nod or a jerk of the thumb toward the inner office where Drew was sitting like a spider in a web which was being spun about the case at hand.

Delaney yawned, braced himself with a drink of ice water drawn from an inverted-bottle, and stepped toward Drew's door. He knocked with tired knuckles. He pressed forward as he heard a hearty: "Come in!"

The operative eyed his Chief with sovereign amazement. Drew looked as fresh as a daisy. There was a pink tinge upon his olive cheeks. These cheeks had been close shaven. Oil glistened from the detective's black hair. His mustache was trimmed and level with his upper lip. His eyes, as he swung and fastened a clear glance upon Delaney, were almost too bright. They were like the hectic fires of an inner furnace.

Delaney searched about the room. He lifted one foot and then the other with a tired motion. He leaned against a filing-case like a heavy dray horse which had come to a final stop. He yawned behind his big, red hand.

"How d'ye do it, Chief?" he asked with a second yawn. "I'm dead on my feet. All the sleep I got was about thirty minutes. I haven't woke up yet. I met myself going to work this morning."

Drew laughed quickly and motioned toward a leather chair. "Sit down!" he suggested. "Sit right down, Delaney. Take it easy for a few minutes. You seem tired."

"It beats me how you can do it!" declared

the operative, sprawling across the chair and crossing his weary legs.

"One or two hours' sleep is never any good. Better keep awake. You remind me of the last rose of Sharon!"

"I feel like a house-man in an all-night poker game. What's the use! I'm going over to some bank and get a job as a night watchman, if this keeps up. I can sleep my head off, there."

Drew swung in his chair and eyed the papers on his desk. He swiveled as Delaney inquired:

"What's the news in the Stockbridge case? I've been asking Marie and Harrigan. They don't seem to know anything except that everybody is out—already." Delaney extended his huge mouth to a cavernous yawn. He fished up his great, silver watch. "What's the news, Chief? Any assignments for me?"

"News? There's very little news, Delaney. No good news, yet! I've been busy as a Chinaman on a contract, though. I can't let that matter get cold. It's now or never in this case!"

"What does our friend Fosdick say?"

"He's all at sea! I've talked with him twice." Drew glanced at the 'phone. "He says the murder was a second Rue Morgue. He can't see any light at all!"

"He's come around to our deduction?"

"There's no deduction in it!"

"He says it's murder?"

"Cold, curdling, cunning, crafty murder, Delaney. The coroner said it would have been impossible for a man to shoot himself in the manner Stockbridge was shot. They're right—both of them—and we're right. I'll stake my badge on it! Particularly in view of the two threats. Why, I was there when he was called up and given twelve hours on this earth."

Delaney glanced out the window. "Snowing again," he said. "I wonder if there are any footprints in that back yard or alley. Wouldn't that be a clue, Chief?"

"To what?"

"Well, you told me that the trouble-man said a tall lad climbed the fence near the junction-box and beat it for Fifth Avenue. Maybe that lad left footprints behind."

"They're snowed over now!"

"But if he made them, couldn't we find them underneath?"

Drew's eyes narrowed. He leaned in his chair with a searching glance at Delaney. "How long did you sleep?" he asked sharply.

"About thirty minutes, Chief. Mary and the kids woke me up and I couldn't get settled again. I did some thinking."

"You must 'ave! That idea about the footprints is a mighty good one. There was first a thaw, then a freeze, then a snow fall which

preserved everything. If we wait till spring there might be a set of prints underneath the other sets. Two of our operatives were there. The trouble-man was there. He scraped the connections. If we find a fourth set of prints, that's our man!"

"The tall lad?"

"Yes, Delaney. We can build a box about the fence and start a thaw of our own. I'll think it over!"

"I'll go up and do it, Chief. I can make plaster-casts of all the prints. There's a French system I heard of once. I can find out from Farot over at Headquarters."

"Keep it under cover for a while," decided Drew, sitting down and drawing a sheath of papers to the edge of the desk. "Keep it quiet," he added. "I'll think it over."

Delaney rubbed his chin. He watched Drew rapidly thumb over the data. "Say, Chief," he yawned. "I see another light."

"What?" shot Drew over his shoulder. "S—o? Wait a moment before you give it to me—you reminded me of something. Where was the spot of powder on my face? The rubber in the Turkish bath said it was right here." The detective turned and touched his forefinger below the lobe of his left ear. "Right there," he added.

"That's where it was, Chief. Just where you

got your finger. It was on the cord. Seems to me that it was circular in shape. Like a half-moon."

Drew raised his black brows in reflective thought. He opened a small drawer with a sudden dart of his arm. He poised a mirror so that the light from the window brought out his left ear and neck. He dropped the mirror to the desk. "Delaney," he said, "that's exactly the spot where Stockbridge was shot!"

The operative felt a cold chill dart up and down his tired spine. He came to life with an oath, and a slap of his huge palm upon his knee.

"Chief, you're right!" he exclaimed, leaning forward. "You're right! That spot of black was just where the old man was hit. Now, what d'ye make of that?"

Drew drummed his fingers on the edge of the polished desk. He tapped his toes on the floor. He coughed and picked up the mirror for a second and longer glance at his face and neck. He tossed the mirror to the desk and swiveled slowly.

"What do I think of it?" he repeated, with flashing eyes. "I think there are features to this case I don't like!"

"Could it have been an accident, Chief? You might of got a bit of soot from the gun and then scratched your neck. Maybe that Harry

Nichols put one over on us. The gun might have been fired, reloaded, and we never noticed it. Looks bad for Nichols and the girl."

Drew closed his eyelids tightly. His brow furrowed in deep thought. "No," he said finally. "I don't think the soot or powder came from the pearl-handled revolver. I don't think so! It would seem to me, Delaney, that intuition is stronger than evidence. That girl and that boy rang true. That valet is above suspicion. The servants are to be trusted. Stockbridge trusted them and he was noted for his shrewdness in picking men. The only mistake he ever made was Morphy. That individual was out to do the old man. He was a biter, bitten! I think we'll eliminate, for the time, Loris, Harry, the servants and German influences in the matter at hand. What was your idea?" Drew rubbed his neck beneath his ear, as he turned to his papers.

"I've forgotten it, Chief. That spot drove it all out. No, wait—say! I've been thinking—this morning laying there and listening to the kids getting ready for school—that the powder we smelled in the library wasn't ordinary powder. I know a firecracker, or a regular Chinese smell when I get near one. That wasn't the kind I got. It was like something else. It was powder—all right—but——"

Drew lifted a sheet of paper. "I covered

that," he said. "Analysis made by Higgens, this morning, shows traces of smokeless-powder in Stockbridge's hair and about the bullet hole. There's a difference. Now, I'm going further than that. I'm going to have those scrapings I got from my neck looked at. If they are the same as the powder that was used to slay Stockbridge, we are getting on."

"There's lots of smokeless, Chief."

"That's the trouble—that's what we are right up against. Let's leave the footprints and the powder for a few minutes. Both are important. They'll wait. See here!"

Drew raised a sheath of papers from his desk, turned with the chair, and started thumbing over the data he had accumulated.

"See here," he repeated absently. "First branch of the tree of Truth in this case is a stubborn one. It requires considerable work on our part to get to the end of it. I've sent out six operatives to scout the telephone calls and get me some light on them. I've kept some notes on what they have 'phoned in to me. The telephone company, the wire-chief at Gramercy Hill, and an official I know, have been enlisted in getting to the bottom of these calls. They have made progress. But, Delaney, of all the devilish inventions of man, a telephone is the most subtle. It's a wonder to me we have found anything. It's the crook's one best tool.

With it he can play safe, and we can't catch him!"

"What have you found, Chief?"

Drew held up a paper. "The first call, Delaney," he said, "was the one to the cemetery company's superintendent, notifying him to excavate a grave in the Stockbridges' family plot. Subtle suggestion, that, in the light of what followed."

"It was," said Delaney.

"This call has received all of the attention it deserved. It's the first of the series, and was perhaps made before the crook had time to cover himself completely. It has been traced to a slot booth in the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in the Woman's Waiting Room."

"Woman's?"

"Yes, Delaney. That is no criterion that a woman did the calling-up. The girl there in charge of the pay-booths states that more men than women use the 'phones in that part of the station."

"Just our luck!"

"The toll collected on this call must have been thirty-five cents, including the war-tax. The superintendent says that the voice over the wire was thin and tired. He says he thought it was Dr. Conroy. He never gave the matter second consideration. Conroy, however, has a voice like a bull. We checked that up."

"Does the superintendent know Conroy?"

"No! Except by name!"

"Then, Chief, I don't see any use trying that lead. It begins and ends in air."

"It most certainly does! We'll cross it out. The next call for our investigation——"

"Which was?" asked Delaney, waking up.

"Which was the one notifying Stockbridge that he had about reached his span of life on this earth. I was there in that library when the call came in. Again, from the millionaire's description, this time, we have the thin, whispering voice on the wire. The man was probably the same. He mentioned the cemetery letter which would establish that fact."

"I'm following you, Chief. Go on!"

Drew picked out a second sheet of paper from his pile. "We went after this call at the time, or soon after the time it was sent in," he said, tapping the sheet with his fingers. "I called the office here and had Harrigan get in touch with George Westlake, third vice-president of the telephone company. Westlake got busy."

Delaney eyed his unpolished shoes with a sage wink.

"Westlake turned things over," continued the detective. "He made a most thorough investigation. We have his word that there is no record of this call! The wire-chief at Gramercy Hill Exchange declares that it never went

through the switchboard. That the connection had been made on the outside."

"From the air?"

"Looks that way. They tried everything and questioned everybody. No one talked with Stockbridge through the switchboard at Gramercy Hill, at or near that hour. Therefore, we must conclude, that, insomuch as I know somebody *did* talk with him at that hour, the connection was made, either in the junction-box in the alley or behind the switchboard at Gramercy Hill Exchange."

"How about underground, Chief?"

"Impossible! That is—almost impossible. The cables are in conduit and sheathed with lead. It would be a poor place to tap in on a line. I'm going to presume that the man who tapped in knew his business. The junction-box in the alley is under suspicion. I think it was done there, in this manner." Drew paused and picked up a third sheet of hurriedly-written notes.

"A junction-box," he said, "is merely a small switchboard where the conduit ends and the house connections begin. It would have been easy for an expert to disconnect the two leads which led into Stockbridge's library, ring up with a low tension magneto, and then cut in with a testing set and a battery current and do the talking. That is what the trouble-man

told us might have been done. He found no signs of tampering. He saw a tall man escaping down the alley. It would seem, Delaney, that this tall man is the one we're after. Perhaps, as you said, he left footprints. But footprints, like finger-prints, are not much use until you get the man who made them."

"What d'ye deduct in this second call—Chief?"

"That we've run squarely up against a blind wall. We'll drop it for a time and go to the third call."

"When was that?"

"Stockbridge was murdered at four minutes and eighteen seconds past twelve, by his own watch, Delaney. It was a very good watch! Now allowing for a movement of the hands on account of the fall, how are we to account for a telephone call sent into Gramercy Hill 9763—the library 'phone—at exactly five minutes past twelve from a slot-telephone booth at the east end of the Grand Central Railroad Station on Forty-second Street?"

"How did you get that, Chief?"

Drew chuckled and wheeled in his chair. "I got it," he said, "by simple arithmetic plus the vice-president's pull. Here's how it was found, Delaney. Easy as two and two. You remember the howler?"

"I'll never forget it, Chief! Not as long as I live!"

"The howler established considerable in this case. The chief operator remembers putting it on. She remembers the time. She looked back, after being jogged by George Westlake, and found that some one had called up Stockbridge a few minutes after twelve. It was probably this call to the old man that caused him to be near enough to the telephone to knock it over when he was shot. The operator did not hear the shot, but she remembers a thin, piping voice asking for Gramercy Hill 9763."

"The same guy, every time!" declared the operative, mopping his brow with his sleeve. "I'd like to have that fellow for five minutes, Chief!"

"We'll get him! We've got the time established twice. Stockbridge's watch fixes the murder at twelve-four-eighteen. The telephone call at five minutes past twelve, and the howler put on soon afterward, checks up. The old man was alive during the telephone call from the Grand Central, and dead when the howler was put on for the first time. Do you see that?"

Delaney frowned. "I see it and I don't," he said. "I'm all balled up, Chief. What with the magpie and the howler and a man shot in a locked room and the spot of soot on your neck

—I'm all twisted into a knot. I think I'll go out and get a drink!"

"No, Delaney, don't," said Drew. "You'll need your head in this case. We're squarely up against class of the highest order. Since Sheeney Mike and the gas-tube over the transom in Chinatown, I don't know of a more baffling set of clews. All these calls—which seem so important in the case—lead to a whispering voice of low pitch and timber. Perhaps the police records will show such a man who is at large—very much at large."

Delaney furrowed his brows and screwed his face into a painful knot. "I'm trying to go back, Chief, to the Morphy case and them crooked witnesses he had. They all had loud voices—like wolves!"

"Yes—I remember them. But then, Delaney, a man can change his voice. That whole pack will bear watching."

"You've eliminated some things that were worrying, Chief. But there's some I don't see yet. It's impossible for a man to get shot like that old millionaire was. We went over that room and that house. We frisked good and plenty. There was nothing suspicious. The walls were thick. The floor was hard-wood. The ceiling was some kind of patent plaster, that's like stone. I got two looks at the door, and you tried the windows. Now what's the

answer, chief? I'll say you are never going to clear this case up. I don't think you can. It's going to be one of them unsolved mysteries. If you do figure something out it ain't going to be proved to my satisfaction. The thing couldn't be done the way it was done!"

"That's definite," smiled Drew, tapping the desk with the tips of his well-polished finger nails. "You're talking in a circle. I'll solve the case, or I won't sleep!"

"It's impossible!"

Drew sorted his papers and bent over them. He turned the swivel chair by a pressure of his knee. His eyes narrowed as he studied Delaney's lugubrious face which was sadly in need of a shave.

"Impossible," he repeated softly. "There's no such word, Delaney. "It's a fool's excuse. Now I don't want you to be a fool. Don't make the mistake of allowing a seeming impossibility to dull your efforts. There's always a way around everything which looks high and impassable. They used to go round the Horn. Now they cut through the Isthmus. They used to think men were supernatural. Now they know that nothing works without a law. I admit that I don't know how Stockbridge came to his end. I don't want to dwell upon it, either. But this we do know, by these papers, that he was well-hated, threatened and marked

for death by an individual or clique of individuals. That is all we know, and all we ever need to know, in order to proceed on the basis that a material agency struck out his life with a material substance—such as lead propelled by smokeless powder."

"Whew!" exclaimed Delaney, rising.

"As for the library wherein he was slain," continued Drew. "As for it, we must revert to simple geometry. Matter occupies space. A material act was committed by a material body which got past all our precautions and struck the magnate down. What is there in this world, which is at one and the same time, material and yet capable of penetrating through a door or wall without a trace? Give me that answer, and we'll get results. What is it?"

"Damned if I know! I'm all balled up! You talk like a college professor. You mean something that is and something that isn't. Good morning!"

Delaney reached for the door knob with a gesture of disdain. Drew wheeled and stared at him. "Wait a minute," he said softly.

The operative turned and dropped his hands to his side.

"You remember the magpie?" asked Drew.

Delaney nodded.

"Well, sit down and wait. It'll be here within five minutes. The valet 'phoned he was bring-

ing it in a taxi. That was just before you came in."

"Taxi!" snorted the big operative, stretching himself on the leather chair. "Them valets have got it soft. Last night was the first ride I've had in one for months, and——"

Delaney's voice trailed to an end. He turned in the chair and saw Harrigan's red face and auburn hair come slowly through the aperture made by opening the door.

"Well?" snapped Drew.

"There's a funny lookin' guy out here, chief," said the assistant-manager. "He wants to see you in person. He's got knee-britches and a bunch of brass-buttons on his monkey-jacket. Says he's a valet."

"Has he got anything with him?" asked Drew.

"He has, Chief! He's got a gilded cage with the damnedest looking bird in it I ever saw. It ain't a parrot and it ain't a crow. It's a blue-jay or something like that!"

"Show him in!" Drew said. "Show him in. You can wait, Delaney!"

CHAPTER NINE

"MEN AND MOTIVES"

THE two detectives leaned back in their respective chairs and eyed each other. Both swung and stared out of the window at the swirling snow which salted across the window in an unending curtain of white. Both returned to the locked stare so common to men who have worked together in danger and know each other's merits.

Delaney's eyes dropped first. He studied the rug beneath Drew's polished shoes. He coughed behind his hand, and turned with a shrug of his shoulders. He fastened upon the closed door a glance of expectancy which brought a smile to the chief's lips.

"Things are picking up," said Drew, with a short laugh. "Your friend—the bird—has arrived."

"My friend?" blurted the big operative. "It's no friend of mine! I'd wring its neck, gladly."

"It may be the key to the whole thing. Smarter men than the ones we are fighting have

fallen through less. You remember Eddy, The Brute, who left his umbrella after him in the Homesdale Murder Mystery. Funny, wasn't it? Took three months to plan the murder and left his rain-stick behind. His initials were on it."

"They can't get away——" started Delaney.

"Here's your bird!" announced Drew, as a knock sounded on the door. "Move over and let that valet stand there. I want the light in his eyes when we're talking to him. Always get the light in the other fellow's eye. Sisst!"

The door opened to a crack—then wide. The valet came in with an important strut. He turned and deposited a cage at Delaney's big feet. The operative moved back with a grunt of disgust. He eyed the cage and contents with a homicidal expression. His eyes raised and fastened upon the valet. He hooked his broad thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest and took a deep breath.

"I hope you're satisfied," he said to Drew, who was smiling. "I hope this black sparrow don't start anything. I'll finish it, sure."

"What's your name?" asked the chief, turning and consulting a paper.

"Otto Braun," said the valet. "Otto Braun, sir."

"Born in Cologne . . . year, sixty-three . . . worked as valet and major domo for British

families . . . came to America with Mr. Stockbridge, and have been with him since?"

"That's correct, sir," the valet said, with a start of amazement.

"Are you married?"

"Twice—sir."

"Wife living?"

"Both, sir. I'm paying a small alimony to both."

Delaney grunted. His foot went out toward the magpie which had finished hopping about the perches of the cage, and was listening with head cocked sideways.

"You—you have charge of this bird?" asked Drew, turning fully around and facing the valet with heavy-lidded intentness.

"I'm its keeper, sir!"

Delaney coughed explosively. He leaned down to cover his confusion. He jabbed a thumb at the bird.

"It's savage," he rumbled. "It pecked at me!"

"Easy," warned Drew, with a quick frown. "Easy, Delaney. I want to get to the facts of this case. We're wasting time."

"Go ahead, Chief."

"I've had you come down here," said Drew, turning to the valet, "in order to find out about that magpie. You had charge of it when Mr. Stockbridge was alive?"

"Yes, sir. I fed it and kept it clean, for the —master." The valet sniffled slightly. Drew watched him with keen eyes.

"Did it repeat much of Mr. Stockbridge's conversation?" he asked.

"Repeat, sir?"

"What I'm trying to get at is, whether or not the bird was in the habit of repeating words that seemed to strike its fancy. Did it act like a parrot?"

"It's very much like a parrot, sir. Sometimes it was sulky and wouldn't say anything for days. Other times, sir, we had trouble keeping it quiet."

Drew turned in his chair and fingered a paper. "I looked up everything I can find in my library here, in regard to magpies," he said. "Is there any difference between an ordinary magpie and a Spanish one?" he added, turning.

"I don't think so, sir. They can all be taught to talk—the same as a parrot, sir."

"Then if this bird should repeat a word, or two words, over and over again it would be plausible to assume that some one had used the word or two words. I want to make myself clear," Drew added with engaging candor. "What I'm getting at is important in view of the fact that this magpie used two words after

we broke down the door to the library and found Mr. Stockbridge murdered."

Delaney leaned forward.

"The words this bird used were 'Ah Sing,' as near as we can arrive at them. Did you ever hear it repeat that couplet?"

"I can't say that I have, sir."

The detective lifted his brows and stared at the cage. "Repeat that," he said to Delaney. "Repeat what we heard in the library."

"Ah, Sing! Ah, Sing! Ah, Sing!" boomed the operative.

The magpie ruffled its feathers and darted about the cage like a sparrow in a barrel. "Keep it up," said Drew.

"Ah, Sin! Ah, Sing! Ah, Singing!" roared Delaney.

"That'll do! You've frightened it. Let it alone for a while. We'll keep it here, Otto. I'll send it back in a few days. How's Miss Stockbridge bearing the strain, up at the house?"

"She hasn't left her room, sir. Mr. Nichols called. The Red Cross people called. There's been lots of callers, sir, but she hasn't appeared, sir. It's early, though."

Drew glanced at his watch. "That's all," he said. "You may go."

The door closed softly as the valet bowed,

replaced his hat and passed out without glancing back.

"A good servant," said Drew, rising and kneeling down beside the cage. "Now, Delaney," he added tersely. "Now, old sleepy head, we have the key to the case locked here. I don't doubt but that you unconsciously struck the right clew when you bawled your little hymn. You said, 'Ah, Singing.' Now couldn't that be Ossining?"

"By God, Chief, it could!"

"Or, more likely, Ah! Sing Sing!"

"Who said that?"

"The bird!"

"But who taught the bird?"

"Nobody taught it! It might have been the last thing said by Stockbridge—just before he was shot."

"And the bird repeated it—to us?"

"Certainly! A parrot or a magpie is a living phonograph. They reproduce a sound, at times, without any idea of knowing what they are saying. This bird may have been so frightened by the shot which was fired in the library, that it recalled the words used by Stockbridge before the shot was fired. These words, in my opinion, tell us that the millionaire was 'phoning to some individual, probably the whispering-voiced man. This individual and Ah, Sing! or Ah, Sing Sing! or Ah, Singing! or Ossining! are

closely allied. Now who of Stockbridge's enemies does that fit?"

Drew rose to his feet and dusted his knees. "Is that clear?" he asked.

"Clear as mud, Chief! I don't get it yet!"

"You will," said the detective, dropping down in his chair and reaching for his papers. "See these," he added, swiveling and darting a quick glance at the bird-cage. "These, Delaney, are a list of the old man's known enemies. I have compiled this list from the secretary's statements, my own newspaper reading, the facts we gained at Morphy's trial, and from what Stockbridge told me in the library before he was slain." Drew counted the list with a steady finger. "There's seven," he said.

"Is that all! I thought there was more 'an that!"

"No! Seven is the number! He was well hated as you will see. First and foremost we have Mortimer Morphy, who is serving from ten to twenty years in state prison, with other indictments hanging over his iron-gray head. He's the captain of them all. He lacks soul, conscience and heart. 'The Wolf of the Ticker' they used to call him. I had the warden on the wire this morning. He's ready to aid justice to the limit. He says that Morphy, or rather Convict 87313, I think they call them inmates

up there, is well and working. He's in charge of the books in the front office."

"He'd never keep any books for me!" declared Delaney.

Drew nodded. "Me, either," he said. "I have heard too much about his past to trust his future. Stockbridge always feared him."

"Does he fit what the black crow said?"

"He does, most certainly! Sing Sing and Morphy are linked together in every way. Morphy must have been mentioned on the wire and Stockbridge shouted, 'What, in Sing Sing?' or words to the same meaning."

"Go on," said Delaney, glancing at the magpie with round eyes.

"Then comes Vogel, who was at state's prison, but whom they transferred to the hospital at Glendale, where he is said to be dying of tuberculosis."

"I remember him. A little runt with a big nose. That might be the whispering voice, Chief, if he's got T. B."

"Hardly! I also had Glendale on the 'phone, or Harrigan did. They say Vogel is right there and is going to stay there, if fifty guards will keep him."

"Next, Chief?"

"The next is Vogel's partner, Ross. You remember him? A good-natured, fat fellow with a bald head. He was always smiling. He's

making little rocks out of big ones in a convict camp near Lake George. He was at Sing Sing, or Ossining, for a time. Most of the New York prisoners are taken there first. It's a sort of clearing house for the other prisons of the state."

"Would he fit in with what this bird said, Chief?"

"He might!"

"Go on, I'm getting interested."

"Then," said Drew, "we have the two brokers who handled Morphy's Blue Sky, preferred; Flying Boat, and other swindles. They are at Sing Sing."

"What's their names, Chief? I've forgotten."

"Greene and Goldberg! One confessed and one turned state's evidence. They got off with from two to four years. A nice bunch of squealers!"

"They'll be out pretty soon, Chief!"

"Yes—but they're harmless. I don't think they had anything to do with the murder of Stockbridge. The other fellow might."

"Who's that, Chief?"

"Finklestein—the banker. The one who went before the Grand Jury and claimed exemption. He's somewhere on the outside. I think Flynn is covering him. I sent him over

to Jersey, where Finklestein has a place near Morristown. We'll hear of him later."

Delaney shifted his big feet and started counting on his fingers. He widened his eyes. "There's one more," he said, as Drew leaned back.

"Yes, there's one more. I kept him for the last. He's out of sight, reach and hearing. You know who I mean?"

"That guy who invented wireless boat, or flying boat, or them movie-picture things in seventeen colors. I know who you mean. He beat it, slick as any porch-climber. What's his name, Chief?"

"Morphy's brother, Cuthbert Morphy! He's an electrical-engineer and the inventor of all their shady promotions. He's the real brains of the mob. You never saw him?"

"No—did you?"

"Can't say that I have!" declared Drew with a snap. "I call him one of my failures. I've made enough. Remember how Flood and Cassady searched for him after the others were arrested? He's cost us thousands of dollars —without result. I charged it to Stockbridge."

"Which way did he go, Chief?"

"He beat it for Argentine. From there he went across South America to Antofagasta. From there he disappeared like a rocket in No Man's Land. No trace was found. For all we

know, he might be right here in little old New York—the best hiding place in the known world. I hate to think of the places a man could plant in this town!"

"Sure! But they always come around the old corner. Remember Dutch Gus, the box-man. Five years, Chief, in every town on the map, and then he was picked up at Forty-second Street and Broadway. Maybe your friend, Cut-bert, will show up some day?"

"Cuthbert!" corrected Drew. "He's no friend of mine, Delaney. The trouble is, we haven't got a single photograph of him. That shows he was figuring on crime all his life. A man who don't get his picture taken, is generally a man to watch."

"He's slick, Chief. What does he look like?"

Drew pressed a buzzer-button. "Look like?" he said, turning toward the door. "Oh, he is a little fellow, quick-tempered and probably handy with a gat. He's dangerous. I think Cuthbert Morphy is a good lead if we can find him."

"I never did like that first name!" Delaney blurted as Harrigan opened the door to a crack.

"What have you found out about Harry Nichols?" asked Drew, as the assistant-manager stepped in softly.

"Got Plattsburg, Chief," said Harrigan briefly. "Harry is O. K. up there. Captain's

commission. Three months intensive training. Going to France soon. On fourteen-days' furlough in New York. Was floor manager for Harris, Post and Browning. Quit good job to go in the Army. Harris, of the brokerage firm, says Harry can come back and hang up his hat any time. That's about all!"

"Umph!" said Drew. "That's fine, in a way. He couldn't have a better record. Now we'll lay him aside. What did Frick learn at Ossining?"

"Frick 'phoned once. I was going to connect you with him but that fellow with the bird-cage came in. Frick says the warden is O. K. and will lend every aid. He saw Morphy in the Auditor's Department. Looks worried, he says. Getting old! The visitor's list shows that he's had an average of three visits a month. No sign of his brother. There's a fellow calls, though, who might be Cuthbert Morphy. Answers general description. They'll pinch him next time he comes. We never thought of looking for him there!"

"No! We were going to *send* him there! It's like a crook, though, to play with fire. What else did Frick say?"

"Nothing more, Chief. He's looking around. He says he'll report as soon as there is anything. He says——"

"Buurr! Burrr! Burrrr!"

Drew turned and snatched up the telephone receiver. He pressed the diaphragm to his ear. "All right," he said tersely. "Connect me. Yes!"

Delaney breathed deeply and watched his chief's face.

"Hello! Hello!" whispered Drew. "Yes," he added guardedly. "Yes, Commissioner. . . . What? You say that . . . that the autopsy on Stockbridge's body—head—shows what? Repeat it! I can't quite hear what you are saying. Louder, Commissioner! That's better. Yes—all right now, Fosdick. It shows. . . . It shows that the cupronickle bullet found in—in, . . . repeat that. . . . In Stockbridge's brain was not scored or . . . or what? . . . Marked? . . . Wait! I don't get your meaning. . . . It was lodged in the soft tissues of the. . . . Yes! . . . I see! Go on. . . . There were no rifling marks on it. . . . What?"

Drew turned and motioned toward the open door. Harrigan closed it softly as the detective resumed his position at the 'phone. "Yes," he said tersely. "Yes, Fosdick. That's important. I should say it was important! . . . New wrinkle, what? . . . Why, I'd think at a quick jump that the bullet which killed the old man wasn't fired from a regulation revolver. . . . Yes, it couldn't of! . . . It must have been fired from a smooth-bore rifle or pistol! . . . What?

. . . Yes. . . . It seems that way to me. . . . Are you dead sure?"

Drew waited. He tapped the desk with a pencil. He reached with his right hand and pulled a sheet of paper to him. "Go on," he said slowly. "Yes, go on, Commissioner. Oh, I've been busy! Yes. You have! Well. . . . I wouldn't of. No, I don't think that's the right lead at all. They're all right. All right. . . . Go to it! . . . Good-by, Fosdick."

The detective flipped the receiver on the hook and slowly swung the chair. His eyes darted first at Harrigan and then rested upon Delaney's broad face.

"That damn fool!" he exclaimed. "He's pinched the whole bunch of servants. He's looking for the valet. The butler is under lock and key. All that's left up there is the housekeeper and some housemaids and Miss Loris. He better not touch her! Brass Band Fosdick! He's a mile off the case!"

"What about that bullet, Chief?" asked Delaney.

"Oh! That's new! It's different and important. The coroner's inquest shows—the autopsy, I mean—that the bullet found in the millionaire's brain was a cupronickle affair of twenty-two caliber projected by smokeless powder from a smooth-bore weapon held not more than three inches from the old man's head."

"Whew!" whistled Delaney. "That's going some, Chief," he added, rising. "But what does it mean? I ain't got that at-tall!"

"Nor I!" snapped Drew. "We're only getting deeper and deeper into facts. After a while we'll have enough of them to solve the case. The smooth bullet is important. It suggests many things—a home-made gun, for instance."

"Might have been an old Civil War gun, Chief."

"I don't believe there was anything like that in Stockbridge's house. You might inquire when you go up. He was very modern with his Flying Boat stock and his improved munitions for the Allies. He has no old collection of arms."

Delaney stared at Harrigan. Drew swung to his desk and tapped the blotter for a moment. "We'll get busy," he said briskly, as he swung back again and faced the two operatives. "I've almost got my man. That bird there," Drew pointed toward the magpie, "is our one best bet and lead. I may be wrong, but I'll wager a good cigar there's a convict or ex-convict at the back of this case. How else can we explain 'Ossining' or 'Ah, Sing' repeated through the magpie to us. It's not an impossible clue. It might happen. Let's move with both feet!"

Delaney rose lankily and stood by the door. He braced his shoulders, then shelved them for-

ward as he reached a finger toward the bird-cage. "Pretty Poll!" he said.

The magpie darted about the cage like a shaft of blue light. It came to rest with its tail feathers thrust through the bars. It peered with beaded eyes at Drew who had snatched up a bundle of papers and was sorting them.

"Get busy, Delaney, on this assignment!" he said sharply. "Waste no time. Run up to Stockbridge's and get me plaster-paris casts of all the foot-prints you can find around that junction box. It's stopped snowing," he added, glancing out the window.

"All right, Chief."

"Wait a minute. Stop somewhere on your way up-town and find out the exact temperature changes last night. What I want you to get is a record of every quarter-hour, so as to show when the early, packed snow in Stockbridge's yard froze solid. The under crust!"

"I got that in my head, Chief! That's my idea, exactly. If a tall lad tapped in on the junction box early in the night his footprints will be frozen close to the ground. The whole surface is level now, but there ought to be ice-posts sticking up when I get done thawing."

"That's right! You'll probably find the trouble-hunter's and one other set of prints. The other set is our man's!"

"What size feet did the trouble-hunter have?"

"Small—about six!"

"All right, Chief, I'm off."

"Wait a minute." Drew studied a sheet of paper. "After you get the temperature data, Delaney," he said. "After you get that and the plaster casts of the foot-prints, go into the house and stay there. Watch Miss Loris. Don't talk to Fosdick's men. Tell her to be careful. Tell her that she is in grave danger. Remember that the same man who threatened Stockbridge over the wire, also said he was going to get her. Remember that, Delaney!"

"Good-by!"

"Get a shave!" shot Drew out through the closing doorway.

"I'll do that little thing," came echoing back with a hearty chuckle.

"Now, Harrigan," Drew said, shuffling the slips of paper like a deck of cards. "Now, we're closing in on our man or men. See if you can find Frick at the prison. 'Phone from the booth!"

Harrigan was back within three minutes. He leaned over Drew.

"Frick was with the warden," he whispered tersely. "He was easy to get. He says that Morphy has been trying to telephone——"

"What?"

"Tryin' to telephone, Chief——"

"What has he got to do with the telephone? What right has an inmate of a prison got to phone? Unless—unless the warden thought the case was justified—like in sickness or important business."

"Maybe the warden allowed him, Chief. I didn't ask Frick!"

"Get out there and ask him! Quick!"

Drew waited with every muscle taut. He drummed the table with impatient fingers. He thumbed the sheath of papers he had collected on the Stockbridge case. He wheeled in his chair and stared out through the frosted window with unseeing eyes. The vision came to him of a pompous old man in prison gray, strutting about the front office with silk socks and a Havana cigar. Drew had no sympathy with a certain kind of convict. The misguided safe-blower or house prowler might be excused for a great many things. The pickpocket was a professional, who took his chances as they ran. The gentleman bank-wrecker, with his over-extended tale of woe and his bid for the world's sympathies, was the one the detective detested with all his soul. Such men, he believed, were beyond the pale. They knew better. Morphy, for instance, had not only gotten away with much of widow's and orphan's money, but he

had wrecked a score of homes and dragged down many with him at the final assizes.

"So he uses the phone!" Drew repeated like an indictment. "Well! Well! Well!"

Harrigan stepped in through the door. Drew turned away from the window and stared at the assistant-manager. "What did you find?" he snapped.

"I found enough, Chief! Frick says that Morphy is the whole thing up there. They call him the 'Assistant-Warden,' in jest. The Welfare League won't have anything to do with him. They got him down for a squealing 'rat.' "

"You can't fool the Gray Brotherhood," said Drew. "Their rooms are too close together. What about this telephoning? Who was it to?"

"A telephone booth in the Subway Station at Times Square!"

"Good God!"

"Frick says it was! He tried to listen but Morphy came out and looked around twice."

The detective rose from his chair and grasped Harrigan's narrow shoulders with fingers of steel.

"Get out there!" he ordered through line-drawn lips. "Get out there and phone from the soundproof booth. Ask my friend—the vice-president of the telephone company—to find out for us whether Morphy or anybody else in

the prison telephoned at four minutes past twelve this morning. Get that?"

"That was when Stockbridge was shot, wasn't it, Chief?"

"It was!" exclaimed Triggy Drew.

CHAPTER TEN

"A WOMAN CALLS"

THE business of a modern detective agency is managed in much the same manner as a corporation or a large firm of corporation lawyers. Its tentacles, or operatives, are spread over the globe. Its news and assignments come in via wire. Its telephone and telegraph bills amount to thousands of dollars every year. In no other way can satisfactory results be secured.

Drew had started his agency on a shoe-string and ran it into a "tannery," in the parlance of the street. He had made many mistakes. He had once, to his knowledge, sent the wrong man to prison. This mistake had been so costly, he never spoke of it. It was soon after the conviction of the innocent man, that Drew gave up circumstantial evidence and got down to hard work, wherein the evidence accumulated was tempered with some degree of fact and common sense.

The first Stockbridge case had been in connection with an absconder. This man, Drew

brought back in person from Adelaide. The work so pleased the millionaire that when Morphy broke under the financial strain and robbed everybody, right and left, Drew was called in to bring the promoter to the bar of justice. It was a long fight, fraught with danger and disappointment. The courts dragged. War broke over the civilized world. Morphy fought fiercely —like a cornered hyena. He was sent away, after dragging down his confederates. He had sworn at the time of conviction that he would get Stockbridge if it took to the longest day of his life. Drew remembered this oath and promise as he waited for Harrigan to appear from the booth.

He turned to the magpie and the cage. He studied both with keen eyes which had been trained in the school of hard facts piled upon each other until they pointed a way. Stockbridge had owned the pet for many years. It was the one domestic trait in his make-up, save Loris. It would be a strange thing, Drew concluded, swinging toward the window, if Morphy and Morphy's confederates were to fall through a remembered couplet dropped by the magpie. It was in the order of events, however. It was the bright, particular finger which pointed toward the prisoner at Sing Sing. Nothing would be more logical than for the bird to remember the millionaire's last words—or dy-

ing words. They would be shrieked aloud and unforgetable.

"More snow," said Drew to himself. "This is a white day if ever there was one. I wonder if Delaney got to the house in time?"

He turned as a "Buurrrr! Burrrr!" sounded at the ringing-box below the desk.

"Hello!" he said sharply into the transmitter. "Hello! Who's this?"

He waited as some out-of-town connection was made. A thin voice broke in from the silence. The voice rose in timber. "Oh, Hello!" exclaimed the detective, recognizing Flynn, one of his operatives. "Hello, Flynn," he said. "What's the weather like out at Morristown? Yes! . . . Yes! . . . Oh, is that so. . . . What? . . . Too bad! . . . Well, you better come in. . . . Take the first train and jump on the job. . . . He's in Florida, eh? . . . Well, that lets him out. . . . Good-by, Flynn!"

Drew reached for a pencil and scratched a name off his list before he hung up the receiver. "That leaves six," he said, running his eyes down the names of the suspects. "Six to go. We'll round them up—or out. It looks bad for one or two of them!"

He dropped the pencil to the desk with a flip of his fingers. He replaced the telephone receiver on the hook. He twirled the chair and leaned forward with his hands on his knees.

"Nice bird, you," he said, addressing the magpie. "We're alone, you and I. Why don't you tell me what you know—what you heard in that library, when the millionaire talked over the phone and then received the cupronickle bullet in the base of his brain? He said, 'Ah, Sing!' eh? He said it, or we are jumping at conclusions. Have Delaney and I erred—as once or twice before?"

The bird strutted about the cage. It pecked at a hard, white fish-bone, thrust between two bars. It dipped its bill into the water-holder, then held high its head as it gulped. It switched its tail and hopped onto the first perch. There it sat, with coiled claws, as Drew leaned closer.

"Ah, Sing!" he repeated confidentially. "Ah, Singing! Ossining! Sing Sing! Let me hear you do your prettiest, birdie. Don!"

The magpie lowered its head and peered outwardly. It lifted a wing with ruffled dignity. Drew narrowed his eyes. "You were there," he whispered. "You were in that sealed room —that double-locked and triple-watched library. How did the murderer shoot down the old man? How could he do it, Don? I think I know *why* it was done. I'm fairly sure who is directing matters. What I want to know is, what devilish ingenuity of the criminal tribe projected that bullet into the old man's brain? Answer that, Don!"

The bird was as stately as a raven. It seemed to Drew that he heard an echoed "Nevermore." He sat upright and took his hands from his knees. "Answer that, Don?" he repeated.

"Gone batty, Chief?" asked Harrigan, thrusting his shoulders through the open door.

Drew glanced up. He passed his hand over his forehead in a sweeping motion as if brushing cobwebs from his brain. "Guess I am," he admitted, with a sparkling glance at the paper held in the assistant's hand. "Well!" he snapped, recovering himself. "Well, what luck? I see that you got something!"

"Yep! I got him, all right. He's hanging around the front office of the prison seeing what he can find out. He says," Harrigan consulted the paper. "He says, Morphy has been worried all morning. That he acts like a man in a daze. Always——"

"I don't want that, now! Didn't I send you out to call up the vice-president of the telephone company? The same man who helped us early this morning. Westlake!"

"I was getting to him, Chief! He was busy when I called, so I thought I'd get Frick again. That's all Frick had to say, except a——"

"Well?"

"Except he'll stay there until he receives instructions from you to the contrary. Says he'll report if anything turns up."

"Go on with Westlake!" The detective's voice hardened.

"Well, I got him, finally. Had to wait till he cleaned out the callers in his office. He's in charge of maintenance and equipment. He says that their records show——"

"Show what?" Harrigan had scowled at his own writing. "It took some time to get this, Chief. Oh, I see. Well, the records of the Westchester Company shows three long-distance calls from the prison between six o'clock last night and this morning. The first one was at seven-ten P. M. to a slot booth at the east end of the New York Central Railroad Station."

"Good!" snapped Drew. "Good! Go on! We're getting there!"

"This call was for seventeen minutes. It was charged to the prison."

"What was the booth number?"

Harrigan consulted his sheet. "I didn't get that," he said, scratching his head. "Westlake didn't give it to me."

"Go on—we'll get it! Go on! What was the next call?"

"The second call, Chief, was to the State Capitol Building at Albany. It was for three minutes. No more! I guess that was the warden talking to the Pardon Clerk, or something like that. We'll forget it, eh?"

"Chop it out!"

"The third and last call, Chief," said Harrigan with haste, "was to the same telephone-booth at the Grand Central Station. Ah, here's the number! That's why Westlake didn't give it to me on the first call to the booth. Number, Gramercy Hill 9845, Chief. That's over near the east end of the building—on the lower level."

"A quiet place!" mused Drew.

"Yes! Well, Chief, here is the time. The call was for twenty-two minutes, extending from a quarter to twelve—midnight—to seven minutes after twelve. It was charged to the Auditing Department of the prison."

Drew rose from his chair. "That covers the hour in which Stockbridge was murdered!" he declared, reaching for the roll-top of his desk. "That's nice work on your part."

Harrigan flushed slightly. He leaned over and laid the paper upon the desk. Drew took it, folded it with two fingers forming the creases, then crammed it into his breast pocket. The roll-top came down with a bang. Harrigan lifted an overcoat from a tree, helped Drew on with it, and found the detective's hat.

"When will you be back, Chief?" he inquired.

"Hard to say! Get me some French-gray powder. A little will do. I'm going to see if

I can get any finger-prints in that booth. They might help!"

"Will you be back by night?" Harrigan asked, leading the way through the door.

"Don't know! Get that powder! Tell Delaney, if he calls up, that I'm hot after my man. Tell him to stick up where he is, till he hears from me. Tell Flynn, when he comes in from Morristown, that he can relieve O'Toole who is trailing Harry Nichols. I don't think there is much in that. I'm covering every one —that's all."

Harrigan opened the drawer of a cabinet and fingered about till he found a small, round box of gray powder used for preserving finger-prints. He turned with this and saw that Drew had crammed into his side coat-pocket, a flat camera which the telephone girl brought to him. "Got flash lights?" asked Harrigan.

"Yes. There's some in the back of this camera." Drew slapped his overcoat. "I got everything, I guess. Remember about Delaney and Flynn."

The detective moved toward the door which led to the hallway where the elevators were. He turned as Harrigan laid a hand on his shoulder. "What's that sticking out of your other pocket, Chief?" asked the assistant-manager. "A paper, ain't it?"

Drew flushed beneath his olive skin. He

pressed the object down with soft fingers. He turned and said simply:

"That's a picture of the girl in the case. Forgot I had it. Good-by!"

The door slammed as he strode over the white tiling and jabbed at an elevator button with his right thumb.

Swirled in wind-blown snow from the office buildings and wrapped to the chin with the collar of his overcoat, Drew plunged, with head downward, for the nearest subway station.

He caught an up-town express, and, after three grinding station-stops, he reached the Grand Central Station wherein was the telephone-booth to which the calls had been sent from the prison.

He made swift work of the matter at hand. Time was pressing. The booths, to the number of three in that portion of the station, were fortunately empty.

Going over the slot-box and the tiny shelf in the center booth, which bore the number "Gramercy Hill 9845" on the transmitter, Drew pulled the door shut and dusted all the nickel work and the polished surface of the receiver, with French-gray powder of superior make.

He took three exposures by aid of small flashes. He opened the door and allowed the smoke to escape. Pocketing the camera, after winding on a fresh film, he entered the booth

for a second time and inspected its lower paneling for possible clews.

An oath, close-bitten and expressive, escaped his lips as he discovered a small hole drilled through the woodwork. He stooped and peered through this opening. It led to the next booth. It had been made with a long auger of quarter-inch diameter. Shavings lay upon the floor of the booth.

He emerged and investigated the second booth. The hole came through, underneath the slot-box. It had been drilled in order to make a connection between the two telephones. He found splinters and sawdust at his feet. He backed out and stood perplexed. There was no way of finding out just what sort of connection had been made between the two booths. All evidence of wires had been taken down. Only an expert could give an answer to the new riddle. Drew recalled Westlake as he rushed to the subway-platform.

He found the vice-president busy, with a score of men waiting in the outer room of the telephone company's office. The secretary-in-charge hurried in with his card and his urgent request for three minutes' important matter which could not well wait.

Drew, however, was forced to wait seven minutes by his watch. He chafed at the delay. He crossed his legs at least once each leaden min-

ute. He feared that the trail was getting cold. Twice he rose, as if to go. Each time the secretary had indicated patience by an arching of her brows and a jerk of her thumb toward the ground-glass door.

"Send in Drew!" boomed as the door opened and let out the caller. Drew strode in with his notes in his hand.

"Just a minute, Westlake," he said, dropping into a chair and leaning over the desk behind which sat a good-natured official of the superior order. "A minute! I'm in a jam! What d'ye make of this?"

Drew related his discovery in the booths of the Grand Central. He went right to the point. He explained the auger-hole, the shavings, and the fact that it was the same set of booths to which the call had been sent from the prison, over the time Stockbridge had been slain.

Westlake listened with dawning light. He leaned back as Drew finished talking. He smiled. He thrust his thumbs under his vest. "You're a hardworking man, Drew," he said, "but you didn't get it all. Do you remember the third call that I gave you this morning?—the one when the chief-operator at Gramercy Hill put the howler on? It was from the same booths you just mentioned!"

"What?"

"It certainly was. There's no use looking

at the record. The number was 9844 Gramercy Hill. In other words we have the evidence to show that a thin, whispering voice called up Stockbridge from one booth in the Grand Central at the same time the prison was connected to the adjacent booth."

"For the love of Mike!" said Drew.

"Yes—your case grows interesting, Chief. You've got a lot of tangled leads and all that, but a little more work should untangle them. A telephone engineer ought to make a crackerjack detective. He's trained to unsnarl the worst snarls in the world. You ought to see some of our wiring diagrams. It takes study to trace them out. You're learning!"

"I don't know if I am, Westlake. I think that Morphy, up at the prison, has been 'phoning New York. I believe he has a confederate in this town. This confederate, we will say, received his instructions about midnight last night. He bored a hole through the booths and called up Stockbridge. But what was it all for?"

"That I can't answer!"

Drew rose from the chair and crammed his notes in his inner, overcoat pocket. "What the devil did they do that for?" he asked with flashing eyes. "Morphy calls up Gramercy Hill 9843 at, or about, midnight. Gramercy Hill 9844 calls up Stockbridge. Stockbridge was killed

by a bullet in the neck as he's talking over the 'phone. Was the call to warn him? Was it to threaten him? Was it to occupy his attention so that the murderer could get in the room and fire the shot?"

"Did you find out how he got into the room?" asked Westlake, leaning forward.

"I have not! The whole thing gets weird. I can't sleep! I'm not going to sleep till I get some light on this!"

"You look healthy," said Westlake, as he pressed the buzzer for the next caller.

Drew emerged from the elevator and hurried to the street with short, quick strides. He crossed the snow and pressed open the door to a cigar store. He fished out a nickel and called up his office.

To Harrigan who answered, he said tersely, "Get Flynn up to the Grand Central! Get him to the east-end telephone-booth, on the lower level. Tell him I'll be there. He's back from Morristown, isn't he? He phoned, eh? Get him to me! I need him!"

Drew hung up with a swift flip of the receiver. He hurried to the subway station and caught a local up-town. He had time to flash a fourth and fifth set of photos before Flynn came puffing across the lower level.

"See here!" snapped Drew, drawing the operative into the middle booth. "Bend down

there where that hole is, and tell me what you see on the varnish."

"It's finger-prints, Chief. "Two, three of them. Looks like somebody pressed hard when they drilled that hole. The outer print is a good one of a thumb. Left thumb, I should say."

"That's right! I'm going to find out who made that impression, within one hour. You stay here and grab anybody who tries to talk with the prison. Frick is up there!"

"How about O'Toole, who's watching Nichols?" asked Flynn.

"Leave him stay on that assignment. I need you here. Stick now! Watch everybody who talks over these three phones. Arrest anybody who receives or sends a call to the prison. There's plenty of Central Office men handy for a pinch. Fosdick will back them up!"

Drew rushed for the subway. He realized that he had wasted valuable time by not taking the complete set of finger-print photos on his first inspection of the booths. It was a detail he had overlooked. But then, he could afford to make mistakes. The men or man he was after, dared not make any. This was a thing he had often recalled in dealing with super-criminals.

Fosdick's rooms at Detective Headquarters, on Center Street, were luckily deserted as he

rushed down through the hallway. The Commissioner widened his eyes as Drew handed over the camera, with a request that the films be developed and prints made within twenty minutes.

"Can't be done that soon," said the detective. "Give us fifty minutes."

"I'll make it twenty-five!" shot Drew. "I got lots to tell you, but it'll keep. Get those prints and we'll land our man. The last two films have perfect samples of finger-work. Our man slipped there! He signed his own death warrant!"

The Commissioner pressed a button. To the young man who came, he explained the necessity of rushing the developing and printing of the films. He turned as the messenger hurried out with the camera.

"What about that bullet?" he asked.

"Just as I said, Commissioner. It was fired from a smooth-bore pistol or gun. What do you think?"

"Oh, maybe not! Sometimes there isn't much rifling on an old revolver. Those little twenty-two affairs are made out of cast-iron."

"But the cupronickle bullet shows smokeless powder and high-class criminal activity. I doubt if one of those little rods would take a modern steel-jacketed bullet. They're used in automatics."

"But automatics have good rifling. That bullet was as smooth as before it was shot. Here it is!"

Fosdick opened a drawer and pulled out a later-day projectile of the lesser-caliber.

"This is smooth!" he repeated with heat. "It was cut from the old millionaire's brain. It ain't scratched. It never took the rifling it was intended for. My theory is, that it was fired from a gun of larger caliber. That is to say, it didn't fit the bore. A thirty-thirty rifle might be used to hold a twenty-two caliber bullet. It would not take the rifling of this."

Drew shook his head. "That's hardly possible," he declared. "It's too vague and doesn't suit me. We're going to find that the deeper we get in this thing, the simpler will be the explanation. I remember any number of cases which have been solved in this city where the mystery was so wrapped up in speculation and the improbable that our minds failed to grasp the simple thing which was the solution."

"Then you think the lack of rifling on the bullet might be the opening wedge to catching the man who shot Stockbridge?"

"It could well be, Fosdick. The lack of a thing sometimes is just as important as the visible clue. Do you remember the Rajah case at Gramercy Park?"

Fosdick leaned back in his chair and stared

up at the ceiling. "Seems to me that I do," he said, thrusting out his lower lip. "There was a big jewel missing. Sort of an Idol's Eye case—wasn't it?"

"Exactly! A white diamond was missing at a dinner. Lights went out as they were passing the stone around the table. Lights came on again and the diamond was gone. Everybody accused. A strange print was found on the sideboard. Servants knew nothing about it. The print didn't correspond to any which we took there. Seemed impossible and all that. Well, the very fact that the print didn't correspond was the means of finding the stone and the culprit. You remember it?"

"Vaguely."

"Simple! A Lascar who waited on the table slipped off his shoes, crept into the room, secured the diamond and climbed to the sideboard where he hid it on top of a picture. The thumbprint which we puzzled our heads over was a toe-print! We got the fellow!"

"I recall it now," said Fosdick. "I think one of our men thought out the matter."

"He didn't!" declared the detective. "We worked it out! The city department had given up the case. This may be the same. I'll venture to say that as soon as you get a good operative some private agency secures his services. Now, Commissioner, confess up. What manner

of gun could fire a bullet, such as a cupronickle one, without leaving markings?"

"Smooth bore. An old flint-lock—for instance."

"We'll grant that! They're clumsy, however. The shot which killed the millionaire was fired at very close range through a smooth tube of a greater caliber than the diameter of the bullet found in his head. If it were fired through a gun which was rifled, then there was a collar or collars on the bullet, which we didn't find. The same thing was discovered by examination of the shells which the Germans fired at Paris. There was no rifling on those long-range projectiles. The bands dropped off after the shell left the gun."

"Then this bullet was fired at long range?" Fosdick was openly incredulous.

"No! Again we have the impossibility or seeming impossibility. I examined that library, both before and after the murder. No shot could have been fired from the outside so that a bullet would reach the old man. If that were the case there would have been an opening in the walls or at the windows or the ventilators. Besides, we have the powder burns on the millionaire's head. We are squarely confronted with a paradox. Riddle me that paradox and we will go a long ways toward finding the man who murdered Stockbridge."

Fosdick frowned. "I can't see it at all," he confessed. "I still hold to the theory that we should third degree all of the servants. I've got some of them. If they don't squeal, I'll get the others!"

Drew glanced at his watch. "Personally," he said, "I'm of the opinion that you will not get anything out of them. I think it was a mistake to arrest them. It would have been far better to trail the butler and the doorman and see if they connected with anybody."

"I'm doing this!" exclaimed Fosdick with asperity. "I've got charge of this case, Drew. I got charge and I don't want any meddling. I've my own methods."

"All right," said the detective. "All right! I want a check-up on the finger prints and then I'll be going. I had to come to you for this. You have such an interesting collection."

"Here's your answer!" said the commissioner, rising and striding around the desk. "Take this bullet and look it over. Put it in your pocket. And——"

Drew turned swiftly. The messenger stood in the doorway. He came forward as Fosdick nodded. He passed over the hastily developed prints which Drew had taken. The commissioner glanced at them, frowned, held them to the light, then said:

"We'll try these on the Man Who Can't Be

Beat! He's the best in the world. He'll know in three minutes who made these prints if the fellow is on our records."

The finger-print expert nodded to Drew as they entered a huge room which was lined with mahogany cabinets in the manner of a filing system in a mail-order house. Fosdick passed the five photos into this man's hand. He smiled as the expert adjusted his glasses, pulled out a pocket magnifying-glass, and leaned close up to the prints.

"We're infallible!" exclaimed the Commissioner with superiority. "Watch Pope get your man. He'll hound him out in no time. Eh, Pope?"

The expert was not of a sanguine disposition in the minute which ensued as he ran over the prints, studied them, held them to the light then laid them down on a table and shook his head.

"We have no record of this fellow," he said coldly. "It looks like a man's print. Here's the thumb and here is the middle finger of the right hand, I think. Hard to tell, sometimes. I'd say, as a pretty sure thing, that we have no duplicates in our collection. Shall I look?"

"Yes! Look!" said Fosdick.

Drew felt that the case was slipping from him as Pope fluttered from cabinet to cabinet, pulled out drawers, replaced them and tried still others.

"No go?" he asked as the expert shot back the last cross-index cabinet and turned with shaking head. "No go? Try again."

"Absolutely no record of the maker of these prints," said Pope, holding out the photos. "He hasn't registered with us yet. Whoever made these prints has never been arrested in the United States for a felony."

"How about a misdemeanor?" asked Drew.

"No! They're all in this cabinet. Even if he was picked up on suspicion or for auto speeding or beating his wife,—if he has one,—he would be here. I'm sorry, inspector."

Drew pulled down the lapels of his black coat and turned toward Fosdick.

"Have you got a print of Finklestein?" he asked. "You remember the fellow who was arrested in the Morphy case. He was afterwards released for lack of evidence or else he claimed exemption. I've forgotten how he got off. He's supposed to be in Florida or somewhere in the South. I had a man out to Morristown who reports along those lines. I wish you'd compare these prints with Finklestein's."

"Go ahead," said the commissioner. "Go as far as you like. I don't think that there is anything in these prints. You got the wrong ones —that's all."

"What's Finkle—Finklestein's initials?" asked the expert.

"J. B.," said Drew quickly. "Julius B.!"

A quick search through an alphabet-index, a consultation of two drawers, out of which the expert pulled some tiny squares of cardboard, and then a slow shaking of his head, brought Drew back to where he had started from before taking the prints in the booth.

"No record could be more different," Pope said. "Finklestein has a big hand and very broad fingers. The fellow who made these prints has a little hand with thin fingers. The whorls and loops are entirely dissimilar. He comes under classification 2-4-X. Finklestein is in cabinet 2-9-0. They couldn't be further away."

Drew started out through the doorway with Fosdick following him. They stood on the landing leading to the downstairs steps, where the detective was about to leave the commissioner with a curt good-by. His hand was out when he drew it back, dropped it to his side and wheeled with sudden intuition.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Are you and I detectives or children? Come back to the finger-print room. Hurry now. I want to see Pope. I forgot something!"

The expert rose as they entered. "Well?" he asked with arching brows and a slight frown on his face. "Well, what is it?"

Drew pointed a finger as steady as a rifle.

He bared his eyes into Pope's own. "Were you up to Stockbridge's house?" he asked swiftly.

"Yes! Why?"

"Did you take prints and photos of everything in the library? I understand that this was done after I turned the case over to Commissioner Fosdick."

"It was done!" rasped Fosdick. "Of course it was done. It's always done when a case looks like a homicide!"

"This case looked worse than that!" said Drew. "It was slaughter!"

The commissioner turned to the finger-print man. "Where are the prints and photos you took up at the house?" he asked.

"Still in the developing room."

"Do you think they are developed?"

"I'll soon know, sir," he answered, pressing a button.

The messenger entered who had attended to Drew's prints which the detective took in the telephone-booth.

"Get down to the developing room," ordered Pope. "Get me all the prints and positives of Exhibit 12 of the Stockbridge case. Bring what is already developed. Tell them to rush the others."

The three men waited in silence for the return of the messenger. Drew paced the floor

thoughtfully. He clasped and unclasped his hands behind his back. He had almost slipped in an important matter. It was a chance he was taking, but a vital one in the case. The finger prints taken by the expert in the library might and might not jibe with those taken in the slot-booth. If they were the same, or any one was the same, the case would offer a new line for investigation.

A sliding footstep at the door announced the messenger. He held a sheath of curling papers in his hand. Pope reached and snatched the photos. He ran over them with widening eyes. He sorted them into two piles upon the table.

"Five prints!" he announced, glancing at Drew with a sly smile. "Five of these prints are the same as your set. In other words, the man who made the impressions in the telephone-booth was also in the library at or about the time of the murder!"

"Impossible!" snorted Fosdick.

"Ah!" said Drew. "Photos don't lie. Now we're getting there! That's the first light I've seen in some time. It clears the case of the supernatural. It puts it where it belongs—in the material world of flesh and blood and hate and revenge."

"It does that!" corroborated the expert, siding with Drew. "Now," he added good-

naturedly, "I'll help out some more. I've got a book of notations made in the library. I spent two hours there this morning. I flashed every print I could see. There's some of the butler on the bottle and the tray. There's a number on the polished table. There are at least six on the door knob, to say nothing of the smashed panel. I suppose yours is among them, inspector?"

Drew held out his right hand. "Look and see," he suggested with a short laugh. "I've never been printed in my life."

"That won't be necessary. These three prints which correspond with the ones you took in the booth, settle the matter. There's no record of this fellow in our cabinet. But—he was in that library!"

"Where did he leave his prints?" asked Drew.

Pope consulted a page of his note book. He thumbed over another page, thrust his finger between the sheet and turned to the photos. "What's the number on the back of that one?" he asked, nodding toward the topmost photograph.

"Ten," said Drew, turning it over and studying a penciled number.

"Ten," repeated the expert. "That is a print which was flashed on the corner of the little

table which was overturned when Stockbridge fell to the floor after being shot."

"And the same man made it who made my prints in the booth?"

"The same!" declared the expert dryly.

"I don't see where you two are getting," said Fosdick. "How could a man get into that library, shoot the old millionaire, get out again and go over to a slot-booth?"

"He might have been in the slot-booth first," suggested Drew with slow smiling. "From the booth he went to the house and killed Stockbridge."

"The fact is established," exclaimed Pope, "that the man you are after was in the library and in the booth. That's all you can say. There's no way to determine the exact hour these two sets of prints were made."

Drew lifted a second print. "No. sixteen," he said, turning to the expert. "Where was that made?"

Pope consulted his book. He glanced up at Fosdick, who was ill at ease over the development in the case. "That," he said, swinging his eyes till they met Drew's, "that was made on the hard-wood floor directly under Stockbridge's body. We found the print, with others of the little finger and middle finger when the coroner moved the corpse!"

The detective stared at Pope. "You mean,"

he said shrewdly, "that the man who made the prints in the booth and on the little table, also was down on his knees arranging Stockbridge's body, or doing something like that?"

"He made a distinct impression on the floor despite the fact that the body was moved over it. The polish and the varnish helped to hold this impression. I venture to say that it is there yet."

"Good!" said Drew. "I may have a look at it. I never went after prints in my investigation. I left that to men who knew their business—like yourself."

Pope smiled. He glanced at his book for a third time. "What's the number of that last print?" he asked.

"Forty-four!"

"Taken from the edge of the heavy door which was broken down by Delaney, I guess. Looks like his work."

"I had a hand in that," admitted Drew.

"This print was close to the knob. There's none like it on the knob itself."

"Umph!" declared Fosdick.

Drew glanced at the commissioner. He smiled as he laid his hand on Fosdick's shoulder. "I've got you to thank," he said, "for letting me use the brains and facilities of the police department. I think it clears the case in a remarkable manner."

"How?" asked the commissioner.

"Well for one thing," Drew said, lifting the third photo. "For one thing, we know that our man passed through the doorway before or after the murder. He was in the library. He was in that booth which is a half mile or more away from the mansion."

"I'll grant you that, but what does it prove?"

Drew laid the photo on the table and turned toward the doorway. "It proves," he said, "that Stockbridge was murdered by a man who was never arrested in New York."

"That's a large order!" chuckled the commissioner. "There are a few good citizens and a number of bad ones we haven't got—yet!"

"I'm satisfied," said the detective, pulling his hat down over his head. "I'm going to look for a man who is too clever for his own good. He's stayed out of your clutches. He's forgotten more about telephones than most men know. He's as slippery as an eel and as clever as the very devil. In one thing only did he err, so far in this chase."

"What's that?" asked the commissioner.

"He didn't wear gloves on the job. That's where we may trip him up."

"They all forget something," said Fosdick, as Drew hurried out through the door with a bow toward the staring finger-print man.

The detective hurried down the steps,—

passed the sergeant at the entrance, and turned up his coat collar as he plunged from the building and lowered his head beneath the down driving snow. The entire matter was as he had told Delaney. He would have to find who made the prints!

Deep, drifted snow barred his progress as he struck down through a towering cañon and walked eastward. He had no coherent idea save the one that he wanted the grip of the open places in his lungs and the feel of freedom from stifling rooms and skeptical men.

The case had resolved itself into a battle of wits wherein the culprit who had murdered Stockbridge, by unknown means, had all the advantages. He was unknown. He had the largest city in the world to hide himself in. He could strike at any time and in any quarter. Also, the detective realized, with a chilly oath, the murderer might already be fleeing the city for the south or west. It would be a natural thing for him to do.

Drew had one undisputed qualification for a detective. He was a worker. He lacked the Latin sense of deduction, or the cleverness of a great operative who secured his men through quick brain work and shrewdness.

Hard work, and more work and still more work had won for him the little position he held in the city. He did not overrate his own pow-

ers. He had failed too often to hold himself too highly. Chance was a big factor in the criminal game. The members of the criminal tribe worked through luck and sheer audacity. Many escaped from the net and moved in the underworld until they made their final mistake which was probably so glaring it couldn't be overlooked.

Despite the fact that the finger prints were not of record, Drew held to the swirling conviction that the man he was after was of the criminal horde. There was much to lead him to this belief. The cleverness in connecting up the two telephone booths—the warning through the mail to Stockbridge—the manner in which the murder had been covered up in a score of details, all pointed to a criminal mind of the cunningest order. It savored of practice in crime and study of natural conditions. Its bizarre features placed it out from other crimes and raised it to a class of its own.

The snow which impeded the detective's steps, in some manner cleared his brain. He began to review the series of events. He boxed the case with returning shrewdness. He went over the points like a sailor repeating the compass-chart. He even saw a light.

This light was a star that guided him around a corner and then along the long reach of a white-mantled street where children shrilled

and played. Snow-balls flew past his head. Sleighs and muffled taxis churned by. Women in furs and heavy cloaks glanced up at his olive face from which peered sanguine eyes bent upon a known destination.

He paused at the foot of a flight of steps leading to a library. In this building he knew there would be on file certain data concerning three links of the chain which he was trying to forge about the criminal or criminals who had slain Stockbridge.

He entered the storm-door, shook the snow from his coat, and removed his hat with a swinging bow as he drew erect in front of a prim lady at a desk.

"I want all the books you have on modern telephony," he said with a winning smile. "I'm sure that you have one or two."

The prim lady who knew a gentleman when she saw one, raised her brows and rapidly thumbed over a filing-card system.

"One or two," she repeated. "Why, we have over twenty. Now just what branch of Telephony do you want? There are a number of divisions in the subject. We have Smith on Central Office practice. We have Steinward on Induced Currents in Relation to Magnetism. We have Oswerlander on Switchboards and Carbon Transmitters. We have Burke on Circuits and Batteries. We have——"

"Hold on, please," said Drew, catching his breath. "I better try something easy. One of those Juvenile books with simple diagrams and switchboards or junction-boxes."

Drew carried the book to an alcove which was deserted. He took off his coat, hung it on the back of a chair, upended his hat and sat down with a tired smile. Soon he was busy in the mystery of electricity in relation to the telephone. He conned over the pages. He browsed along like a novice trying to understand trigonometry. He frowned over such terms as micro-ampere and micro-volt. He grew dizzy following wiring diagrams which were far worse than any clue he had ever attempted.

"A telephone engineer," he said half aloud. "A man who could trace out this stuff ought to make a mighty fine detective. I never saw such a snarl. Now what does hysteresis and laminations mean? What's the idea of having an alternating current of low voltage on the same line with a talking current of three volts? I don't see how they can get two currents on one set of wires. Maybe they don't."

He tossed the book to the table in front of him and rose with a frown. This frown changed to a wrinkled furrow of half amusement as he hurried back to the little prim lady.

"Too deep for me," he said, referring to the

book she had given him. "That may be a beginner's treatise, but I'm in the kindergarten class in electricity. What's a micro-volt?"

"I'll look it up, sir," she said.

"Never mind. I wouldn't know, after you did. Suppose you get me a book on magpies."

The librarian fingered her files. "Try Birds of England," she suggested, coming from behind her desk and gliding like a pale shadow over to a bookcase. "Try this. It's complete. You'll find magpies and starlings and piemags and any number of plates of six colors in this splendid volume."

"The one that interested me was black as a crow," he said, as he turned toward his alcove. "Perhaps there are white magpies as well as white crows. I never saw one, though. My bird's a deep one."

The little librarian stared after Drew's vanishing form with a slight pucker between her eyes. For a man of his solid respectability, the series of actions were strange indeed. She sat down and wondered if he was a moving picture editor trying to connect black magpies and telephones.

Drew appeared in two minutes. He leaned over the desk and startled the lady with a request for anything pertaining to guns and projectiles. These she had in plenty. A great many

war books had been purchased during the period which followed America's declaration.

The detective erected a breastwork with the books she brought. He conned them with understanding until he came to ballistics and trajectory. He stopped there. He rose. His brain was crammed with fact upon fact. He had the formulæ of smokeless powder and the analysis of cupronickle bullets. He had absorbed muzzle velocity and angle of fire. He fairly bubbled over with good humor as he thrust his hands into his overcoat, caught up his hat and started out the door after glancing back and bowing to the librarian who smiled a good-by.

The street was dark save for the glow of the overhead arcs. He thrust out his arm and tested the snow fall. It was not as heavy as when he had entered the library. He went down the steps, turned toward the north and plowed along the sidewalk.

Suddenly the thought came to him to glance at his watch. He had forgotten time and place over the hours in the pursuit of knowledge which might and might not be applied to the case at hand. It was almost six o'clock.

"Lord," he said in surprise. "I'm going crazy. Two hours in a trance. Now for work. I wonder what the operatives will have to report? They ought to have something. I wonder," he added, peering under the fine drizzle

of snow, "I wonder where the nearest telephone is located? Another block, I guess."

His brain gathered up the skeins of the case as he hurried along. Finger-prints, plaster-casts, smooth bullets, locked rooms and a raven-black magpie, trooped into their proper formation. He dwelt longest on the telephone information he had gathered in the library. The case seemed bound up in whispering wires and broken connections which might be spliced together with patience and hard work.

The whole matter, from the call of the millionaire, down to the clew discovered in comparing the finger prints at Detective Headquarters, was a city-spread network of telephone connections which had to be traced back to an elusive individual who flitted like a shadow or a whirling dervish across the detective's vision.

He reached the drug-store, paused outside, glanced up and down the white-robed street, then pressed the door open and stamped inside. He found a nickel. Dropping this in the slot and closing the booth, he asked Central for his office phone.

The connection was made with Harrigan on the other end. "What's new in the Stockbridge case?" asked Drew in a whisper.

He listened. He grew rigid as the faithful operative summed up the entire series of re-

ports. There were six of them. The last was from Delaney.

"Hang up!" the detective almost shouted in his eagerness. "Hang up, Harrigan, and let me get him."

Finding a quarter instead of a nickel, Drew dropped it in the large slot and jiggled the receiver's hook until Central answered.

"Get me Gramercy Hill 9764!" he exclaimed. "Quick! 9764 Gramercy Hill!"

"That's her number," he said aloud. "Loris Stockbridge's number. It must be her number. I haven't forgotten that, have I?"

The time consumed in getting the connection seemed endless. Drew lifted one damp sole from the floor of the booth and then the other. The receiver's diaphragm clicked finally. "Hello!" he snapped. "Hello, who's this?"

He waited a full second. "This Delaney?" he asked. "Who?" he added. "Oh! you're the maid! Well get me Miss Stockbridge or Mr. Delaney. Yes, Delaney. D-e-l-a-n-e-y!"

"This Delaney? . . . No! . . . Who? . . . Nichols? . . . Harry Nichols? Hello, Nichols! . . . Is Delaney there?"

The big operative's voice sounded with a rasp on the wire. "What's the news?" asked Drew. "What's that you've been telling Harrigan? Something about a coffin? A coffin? What—a

casket? A hardwood casket. I'll be right up! I'm coming!"

The detective's olive face was the color of burnt pottery as he flipped the receiver on the hook, thrust his knee against the door and charged out of the booth and into the drug-store. He wheeled, turned his coat collar up, drew down his hat and dashed outside as an astonished clerk leaned over the prescription counter and stared after him.

The message that Delaney had sent over the snow-crusted wires, and along the underground conduits, was laden with menace. It drove Drew westward through the drifts like a man who had a whip held over him. He crossed two avenues before he sighted a taxi. He charged after this, sprang to the running board, and shouted into the driver's muffled ear.

"Drive like sin—full speed and more—up Fifth Avenue! I'll tell you when to stop! The devils are not going to kill that little lady if I can help it," he added, as he opened the door and climbed inside the taxi.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"THE CLOSING NET"

NIGHT was falling upon the greatest city in the world. After night would come the myriads of electric lights in the huge Broadway signs—the surface cars creeping through the snow-fall like glow worms—the muffled pedestrians and the chain-tired taxis, with their well-groomed patrons, hastening to ballrooms, cabarets and theaters more luxurious than any dreamed of by Lucullus.

Into the tide of this forming stream of wealth, Drew's taxi turned and ground northward through the drifts. The detective had given no definite address. He wanted the air of the Avenue for at least two blocks, before he reached the Stockbridge mansion. He signaled as a familiar corner came in view. He turned his overcoat collar up to his chin and stepped out, as the driver brought the taxi to a slow stop at the curb.

"Stay around the corner!" he ordered. "Stay, till I send word. Here's a dollar for supper. Get that and wait!"

The driver touched his cap and reached for

the bill. Drew swung northward, threw back his head, and plowed along the snow-laden sidewalk. Delaney's statement over the telephone had stirred every drop of red blood in his body. Loris was in danger! This nerved him on. He clenched his gloved fists as he reached the first side street. He crossed the wheel-churned snow, with his lips gripped in a hard white line. His eyes raised in heavy-lidded scrutiny of the towering turrets and spires of the mansion. Lights shone from its windows as if in defiance to the powers of darkness which encompassed the dwelling.

A snow-crusted form stepped out from a basement shelter. Drew raised his arm as a barrier when a figure of a man lurched in his direction.

"Hello, O'Toole!" he blurted, recognizing the operative. "What are *you* doing here?"

O'Toole jerked a mittened finger in the direction of the mansion. "Our lad's in there," he said, thrashing his arms and flipping his finger for a second time. "Harry Nichols!" he explained.

"S—o! The whole case seems to be gathering again. Every clue leads this way now. What did you learn to-day?"

O'Toole yawned. "I got on the job early," he said with frosty breath. "I waited. The lad came down. He got in a taxi and I'm right after him. First he went to the Quartermas-

ter's Offices at the Battery. Then he went to Governor's Island. From there I trailed him to the Red Cross Headquarters. He 'phoned Gramercy Hill 9764, at least three times."

"To the girl in the case?"

"Yep, Chief! He's gone on her. He tended to some funeral matters connected with Stockbridge, bought some flowers—three dozen lilies of the valley—then came on up here. I've been waiting a long time."

"Seen anybody about?"

"Delaney and some Central Office men—that's all! Shall I stay here?"

"Not here! Jump back in the alley and watch the junction-box. I think Delaney has been there. You'll find the snow melted in spots. Plant somewhere, and keep your eyes open. Grab anybody you see tampering with the wires to the house. I'm looking for trouble to-night. They threatened Loris with a letter this afternoon."

Drew did not stop to explain. He hurried on ahead of O'Toole, turned at the iron-grilled gate, passed through and pressed the button.

A Central Office man with a gold-badge showing, jerked the door open and glanced out. He blinked sagely as he recognized the detective.

"All right!" said Drew. "Let me in!"

The door swung wider. Drew lunged through and turned. "What's new?" he asked, pointing

a thumb over his shoulder. "Are those servants still under arrest?"

"Some of them, Inspector," grunted the Central Office man. "I can't talk much. Fosdick gave me hell for talking to a newspaper man. He left word, though, that you could come in."

"Thanks!" Drew said dryly. "Thanks! That's kind of him. You are holding down this door?"

"Sure, Inspector! The butler and the second-man are down at Headquarters. I don't like the job, but orders is orders."

Drew loosened his overcoat, removed his kid-gloves, stamped his snow-covered shoes on the rug, and hurried past the library, where stood a burly Central Office man on guard. He mounted the steps with the running motion of a boy of fifteen. He glanced upward to where velvet-soft light glowed at the entrance to Loris Stockbridge's suite of rooms. Delaney stood framed in the opening. His huge bulk blotted out the inner rooms. His face, seen in the high shadows, was long and grim.

"She's in there," said the operative, raising his chin over his lifted arm. "Miss Stockbridge is in there. She's with her maid—one Fosdick tried to pinch—and Harry Nichols. She's got a notice by special delivery, that the coffin she ordered from the Hardwood Casket Company, of Jersey City, will be delivered to-morrow.

She never ordered any coffin, Chief. Ain't that dirt—to a girl like that? What d'ye think of it?"

Drew's answer to Delaney's question was a grinding of teeth and a sharp oath of defiance. He clutched the operative's arm in a nipping grip. He led him into the tiny reception-hall of the suite.

The detective paused on the threshold of a larger room. He dropped his hand from Delaney's arm. He stabbed sharp glances here and there about the interior. He widened his eyes as they came to rest upon a further doorway, which was hung with soft tapestries gathered to the side-walls by cords of silk. Beyond this doorway, like the vista of some rare painting, shone an inner light of a woman's shrine.

Silver and pearl and old rose blended into a bower such as is found in palaces. Tiny medallions and plaques and miniatures—narrow framed studies in oil—fans, vases, statuettes of ivory and rare china, a hundred choice and dainty objects of haute-art were in that splendid room.

Drew advanced over a rug so soft and deep he felt like a peri entering Paradise. He brushed aside the tapestries and strode swiftly forward. His hat came off as Loris advanced to meet him from a large chamber, wherein the color scheme

had been worked out in black and white with a suggestion of green-in-gold.

He forgot the material things of that apartment as he bowed gallantly. He thrust his hand forward and clasped strong fingers over her own. The grief of her father's death had widened her eyes and set them in circles of dark brows and tear-stained features. Her voice clutched in her throat as she tried to speak. Her hand was drawn from his slowly. It raised to her broad forehead beneath her blue-black hair, with a passing motion that dispelled some of the doubt within her. She smiled wanly. Her round, young breast rose and fell with the rustle of perfumed laces. She swished her lavender gown behind her with a turn of a white, supple wrist upon which was a tiny, diamond-studded watch of superior make.

"Courage!" said Drew. "Have courage! They won't get you!"

"They—they," she breathed. "They have threatened me like they threatened poor father. They sent a letter. Oh, I wish I were a man!"

Drew flushed beneath his olive cheeks. He reached upward and turned down his overcoat collar. He laid his hat on a chair, braced his shoulders, and stared around the room. His eyes wandered from the walls to the inner opening. "Who's in there?" he asked.

"Harry—Harry Nichols. I telephoned for

him. I was afraid. I admit I'm afraid, Mr. Drew. You know what they did to father?"

"Yes, I know. It was an error on my part. We did not take the proper precautions. But this time—we will!"

"I hope you do. I don't feel like myself, after last night. It came so suddenly. I heard you people talking in the lower hallway. I went to the bannisters and saw all the servants at the library door. And then—and then, I went down without a particle of warning. It was a shock, Mr. Drew."

"One I could have spared you," admitted the detective. "It was preventable," he added, turning toward Delaney.

The operative stepped forward. He struck a chair with his foot and tumbled it over. Picking it up and setting it down on its legs, he flushed guiltily.

"Be careful!" snapped Drew. "Get me that letter this young lady received from Jersey. Get it! We'll look it over right now!"

Delaney glanced at Loris. "She's got it," he said. "I gave it back to her."

Loris shuddered and pressed her hands to her breast. "I tore it up," she whispered. "I was so excited and angry I tore it up. It's in the waste-basket."

"Fetch the basket!" said Drew to Delaney. "Go get it. We'll make this room our head-

quarters," he added, swinging about on one heel. "We'll stay right here and watch things, Miss Loris."

The girl nodded prettily. Her courage came back with flushed cheeks. She glanced up at Drew's strong jaw and face. The detective squared his shoulder with a final shrug. "We'll stay here!" he said masterly. "Though all the demons in hell are closing in on you, we'll stick. We'll get them this time! I've almost got my man. If he moves his pawns to-night, we'll round up the whole bunch and send them to the chair!"

"Are there more than one?"

"Yes! One is directing—another or others are doing his will. Your father was slain in some mysterious manner which we have not, as yet, determined. The man, or men, who caused him to meet with death, left their marks behind them—fingerprints—footprints, voices over wires, and other evidences of material deviltry. They blundered a score of times! They should have killed that magpie. They did not wear gloves when they should have worn gloves. They forgot, or overlooked, that telephone calls can be traced. We've traced them. We've almost succeeded. The trouble is, that time is short. What was in that letter?"

Loris turned toward the inner room. Delaney, followed by Harry Nichols in full uniform,

appeared. The operative held out a handful of scrapped paper.

"Ain't much to learn here, Chief. It's pretty well torn up. I remember what it said, though."

"Repeat it!"

"It was from the Hardwood Casket Company of Jersey City. It was dated this morning. It said that the coffin Miss Stockbridge ordered for the lady who was about to die in her family, would be delivered to-morrow afternoon by express at her town house, as ordered."

"The curs!" exclaimed Drew.

"Sure they are, Chief. The letter was signed by the manager. I think it was the manager. I couldn't read his writing!"

"Let me see the scraps."

Delaney sorted them into a small stack and passed them to Drew. The detective lifted each fragment, held it to the light, and placed it into his right overcoat-pocket. "I get it," he said. "It looks genuine. Did you telephone them?"

"Nope! I was a-waiting for you to come up here. There's a phone here. It's over there!"

Drew nodded. "I saw it," he said thoughtfully. "We better be careful how we use the phones of this house. They tapped the wires before, and they can do it again. We're fighting very high-class devils."

"It doesn't seem real!" blurted Harry Nich-

ols. "I thought that death only stalked in No Man's Land. It's right here, gentlemen!"

Drew frowned and shook his head. He glanced at Miss Stockbridge. He rubbed his hands softly. "No more danger," he warned in a confident voice. "We've got twenty Central Office men in the house or about the place. No bank was ever better protected. There will be no real trouble to-night."

"That's what you said the other time, to father," Loris suggested without thought. "You did—you remember? You were in the library and he felt so confident nothing would happen. Something did happen!"

"I admit it!" Drew said with candor. "I admit everything, Miss Loris. I'm partly to blame. The trouble was, I underestimated my adversary. A man should never do that. This time, though," he added with glazed eyes that roamed the walls. "This time is going to be different. Now, how about all your rooms? We must be sure that there is no slip. We must be sure——"

"Sure, we must be sure!" interrupted Delaney. "I've looked everywhere, Chief. Leave that to me!"

Drew glanced at Loris, who had stepped toward Harry Nichols. He studied the picture the two made, with their heads close together. The captain held himself defiantly, but with that cer-

tain polish which goes with a fondness for the things of life worth having. He had chosen a rather pretty girl, and upon her he had lavished his attentions. He had defied Stockbridge! This was motive enough for a crime. He was not the criminal, decided Drew. There was that to the captain's resolute, though thick lips, and his wide eyes, which assured the detective he would not stoop to low things to gain his ends. He had enlisted voluntarily. He had worked hard at Plattsburg. He had served, and was upon the eve of going to Pershing. No man with such a record would slay a girl's father to gain the girl.

The detective erased Harry Nichols from his mind. "You two," he said commandingly, "had better go into the library! I mean Miss Stockbridge's writing-room. Stay there, please, till Mr. Delaney and I notify you. Who else, beside we four, are in this part of the house?"

"Only the maid," said Loris.

"Go in, please, and wait. I'm going to lock everything up. We're going to take every precaution this time. Frankly, I don't see how any agency can do more than we have already. Were we dealing with ordinary crooks or blackmailers, I would have you take a taxi and move to some Fifth Avenue hotel. But it seems an unnecessary risk. This is the safest place in the world, despite the letter from the casket com-

pany and the former warning. What man can enter this place to-night—without our permission?"

"I'd like to see one!" blurted Delaney.

Harry Nichols offered his arm to Loris. They passed from the view of the two detectives with the locked, gliding stride of two dancers who moved to slow time. Drew heard the portières which led to the writing-room rustle downward and settle into place. He passed his hand over his forehead and breathed deeply.

"We'll get busy," he whispered tersely. "We'll search these rooms again. Let's start with a definite foundation!"

Delaney grunted at the uselessness of this as he reached and took the detective's overcoat which was peeled off and extended to him.

"Hang it on a chair," said Drew sharply. "Over there with my hat. Now," he snapped, "what about the windows of this room, the little reception hall and the bed-room over there? That's a bed-room, isn't it?"

"Sure, Chief! I frisked it good. The Central Office men were up here early in the morning. They went through everything. Fosdick, they say, was like a bull. He said the thing couldn't be done."

"It *was* done!"

"Did you get any clue, Chief, as to how it was done?"

"It's as much a mystery as ever. But we're trimming the tree called Truth with a broad ax. I'm going around this case to get the man or men who did it. Then we'll find out how it was done!"

"Oh!" Delaney's expression was thought-laden. "Just thought of it, Chief. I got them plaster-of-paris casts. I got 'em down stairs. It was some job, believe me. I took everything about that junction-box, after I'd thawed the snow with hot blankets which a good-looking cook brought to me."

"Go down and get them!"

Delaney hurried out through the tapestries of the room. Drew started his search of the apartment by a study of the windows and the catches. He opened one and glanced outside. Snow had drifted to the depth of three inches on the sill. This snow was unmarked. He examined all of the sills extending from the three rooms. He closed and locked the windows. He backed off into the center of the reception room and studied the situation from every angle. The furniture was fragile and in sets of such splendid periods his eyes closed over them. The rugs and tapestries—curtains and portières—sheathings of yellow hand-painted silk from Nippon—rare ceramics and cloisonnés—a huge peach-blow vase of the Ming dynasty and a hundred little

jade and jasper knick-knacks were the outward evidence of wealth.

He opened the plate-glass cases and peered inside. He crawled under a couch and backed out dusting his hands. He tapped with slow knuckles a long cheval-glass by the side of which was a tiny gold-bracket and a silver-plated telephone. He went the rounds of the walls, lifting pictures, portraits and little military oils by French painters of the Franco-Prussian period. He found nothing to excite his suspicion!

Entering a simple bed-room, with its tiled-flooring and its single white bed, he spared this as he passed to the bath beyond, which had no outlet save a ventilating shaft securely barred by a bronze grating of close, fantastic-scrolled mesh.

Delaney's heavy steps were heard in the reception hall as Drew finished. Striding out into the larger room he frowned as the operative deposited a blanket upon a Persian rug and began to untie its corners.

"I got 'em here, Chief," explained the assistant with upturned face. "There's five or six prints—all alike."

"What? Repeat that!" Drew dropped to one knee.

"Sure, Chief. There's only been one guy at that junction-box before the freezing started.

He made plenty of tracks. He came and went from the fence to the box. It's a small foot. There was plenty of prints made after the snow piled on top of these little prints."

"The operatives?"

"Sure, and the Central Office bunch! But these prints I got here are the only ones under the snow. They stuck up when I melted away the surface."

Delaney offered a plaster-cast of the top of a foot-print. It was roughly done. It had been made, like the others in the blanket, by pouring cold plaster within a retaining bulge of soap. The plaster had hardened and brought out each detail. Drew traced his finger over the toe. "Right foot," he said. "Now let's see the others!"

"Here's a left foot, Delaney," added the detective slowly. "Only one left and four right. That might happen. You didn't take them all. Well, bundle them up and plant them somewhere. Put them under that couch, out of sight. I've got an idea!"

"What is it, Chief?" asked the operative as he drew on the knots until he had gathered the corners together. "What's new? I can't see anything in sight, at-tall, at-tall. One man—that's all I see."

"And that's *all* I see—the trouble-hunter—Delaney!"

"But what about the tall guy who looked like a German? The fellow the trouble-man saw getting over the fence and beating it for Fifth Avenue?"

"He didn't leave any tracks!"

"Ah, Chief, get out! That ain't human!"

Drew paced the floor with his hands clasped behind him. He wheeled with sudden energy. "Go, you!" he exclaimed with a pointing finger. "Hurry out of this house and telephone Gramercy Hill Exchange. Tell the superintendent to send over that trouble-man. I want to compare these prints with his shoes. He couldn't have been lying. There's no object in that! But, Delaney, how could a man tap in on that junction-box and never leave prints in the snow? That's my question!"

"How could one shoot a man in a sealed room, Chief? There ain't much difference!"

Drew snatched out his watch. "Hurry," he said. "Get over to Gramercy Hill Exchange—it's only three blocks from here. Ask Jack Nefe, or whoever is in charge, for the trouble-man who fixed the phone last night. He'll be able to tell us what part of the fence the tall fellow, who looked like a German, got over. Perhaps he wasn't at the junction-box at all!"

"Who, Chief?"

"The tall fellow! Perhaps he was skulking about the windows at the back."

"Perhaps he was a ghost," said Delaney to himself as he lunged through the tapestries toward the staircase which led down from the third floor of the mansion.

Drew crossed the room and rapped softly on a panel by the portières which covered the opening to the reading-room and library. He heard a muffled word of warning. Loris Stockbridge glided across the rugs and peered out. Her face was set and tear-stained. She had been sobbing upon an olive-drab shoulder.

"Pardon," said Drew with a slight sigh. "I beg pardon, Miss Stockbridge. I want to look over the sitting-room and examine the windows. Where is the maid?"

Loris touched her eyes with a handkerchief drawn from her breast. She replaced this and nodded over her shoulder. She parted the portières with her unjeweled right hand. "The maid," she said softly, "is in her room. That's back of this reading-room. Shall I call her?"

"You and Mr. Nichols come in here, please," said Drew. "I'll knock on the maid's door and look her over. We can't be too careful—remember that. It's getting late," he added with candor.

Drew allowed Harry Nichols and Loris to pass him as he held the portières for them with a thoughtful bow. He crossed the reading-room, examined the books and cases, glanced

under a low divan, and saw to it that each window was latched before he knocked lightly upon a further door which was hidden by curtains.

A maid appeared, in smart white apron and pursed lips of inquiry. Drew regarded her not unkindly. He ran his eyes up and down her trim figure from the black bow in her brown hair to the wide ribbons which laced her trim French shoes.

"How long have you been with Miss Stockbridge?" he asked.

"*Merci, Monsieur!*" she courtesied. "It has been for zee longest time. *Cinq—sept, année, monsieur,*" she counted mentally.

"Good!" said Drew closing the door lightly. "Good little girl. We won't bother you the rest of the night," he added as he turned a good key in a perfectly good lock and dropped the curtains.

"Now!" he said with a final glance about the reading-room, with its morocco-bound tomes and glowing lights. "Now, let the worst come! Let that come what may!"

He strode through to the reception room, glanced slit-lidded at Loris and Nichols, who had seated themselves in the deeper recess of a splendid alcove, and hurried to the hall where Delaney was hastily removing his coat, and showing other evidences of some answer to his quest at the telephone exchange.

"Well?" asked Drew as the bulk of the big operative loomed through the tapestries. "Well, what did you find out over there?"

"Enough, Chief!" Delaney's voice was hard. He glanced at Loris and Nichols. His right eye closed in a warning wink of caution.

"Come into this other room," said Drew. "Come right in, Delaney. This way!" Drew lifted the portières, then dropped them after the operative had stumbled forward.

"What did you find?" he asked into Delaney's ear. "Out with it!"

The operative glanced about the reading-room. He blinked at the glowing electrics. He recovered his voice as he drew in a deep breath which bulged his chest to barrel proportions.

"I went," he said huskily. "I went to Gramercy Hill Exchange. Found the superintendent. . . . Fellow, you told me to find, Chief . . . I draws him to one side. . . . I asked about this trouble-hunter. . . . He ups like I'd hit him. . . . He says fellow quit to-day. . . . Says fellow. . . . Says he was no good. . . . Says he was tapping joints instead of soldering them. Says he only hired him on account of the shortage of electricians and helpers . . . because of the last Army draft."

"Did you get his address?"

"I got it, Chief. . . . It is over on Fifty-third Street near the River. . . . I didn't go. . . . I

wanted to see you first. . . . There's more."

"Out with it!"

"The superintendent says he never sent that trouble-hunter over here last night. . . . There's a record of sending another man named Frisby."

"Did you see—Frisby?"

"I did, Chief."

"What did he say?" Drew's fingers had clutched the operative's arm. "What did he say?" he repeated grimly.

"Said, that Albert—that's the trouble-hunter—had stopped him on the way over here and took his place. . . . Said, he was satisfied. . . . Albert could have *all* the jobs on a night like last night. That's just what Frisby said, Chief!"

Drew loosened his fingers from Delaney's arm and turned slowly. The portières swayed slightly. They shook anew. They parted at the center and revealed Loris Stockbridge. Her eyes burned the soft gloom with glazed interrogation. She raised her white hand and pressed back her hair from her forehead. She stepped forward with her knees striking against the stiff satin of her skirt. She swung from Delaney toward Drew.

"What were you saying?" she asked imperiously. "What did you say about a trouble-man? What was it, please?"

"I'm lookin' for one, Miss!" declared Delaney. "I was over at the telephone company's exchange lookin' for the lad that was here last night and fixed the junction-box in the yard back of the house. Mr. Drew wants him."

Loris turned toward the detective. "You want him?" she asked softly. "What do you want him for? Please tell me. I don't like him, at all."

It was Drew's turn to draw in his breath. He eyed the girl. He tried to fathom the reason for her simple question and her objection. "Miss Loris," he said, shrugging his square shoulders. "Why, it's a slight matter. The man has disappeared. We can't find him. He's flown—perhaps."

"Is he a little chap with a satchel and a testing set?" she asked. "A nice-mannered, soft-voiced little man who was so obliging, and yet so—oh! I don't know what I have against him. He's so sly—don't you think so, Mr. Dr—e—w?"

"When did you ever see him?" asked Drew, feeling the blood rising to his cheeks at a thought which surged through his brain.

"Meet him? Why! he was here early this afternoon. He was all over the house!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

"SUSPICION FASTENS"

TRIGGY DREW had been trained in the hardest school in the world. Loris Stockbridge's statement, delivered with such sincerity and so naïvely, completely upset him. It was like a gentle reminder that, as a hunter of men, he had failed. He took the blow with flaming cheeks and an almost stopped heart.

Delaney realized that something of moment in the case had happened. He stared at his chief, then turned his eyes upon Harry Nichols, who stepped through the portières and stood by Loris' side.

"What is it, Chief?" asked the operative. "Was there anything in what she said?"

"Anything!" exclaimed Drew, recovering himself with a tossing shrug of his shoulders. "Anything? Everything! The man we want is——"

"Found?" breathed Loris clutching Nichols' arm.

"Not yet—but *very* soon!" said the detective

with sanguine eyes. "We want that trouble-hunter, Delaney," he added gathering in the details for action as he spoke. "You'll have to hurry right over to the address and see if you can round him up. If he isn't there—get him! I want him brought here at once. He's got much to explain!"

"I'll go right now," said Delaney, starting toward the reception room.

"Wait," said Drew.

Delaney turned at the portières.

"Don't phone me here," the detective warned. "Don't do anything by telephone. We're on the trail of a man or men who can tap wires. He or they may have a confederate in this house. Be careful—get your suspect and bring him here. We'll try him with the foot-prints. We'll check up with the finger-prints. Then, if he don't cave in, we'll turn him over to Fosdick and the Third Degree. I firmly believe that Albert, whom I saw in the library and who was in this house in the early afternoon of this day, is implicated in the murder. Strange that I never suspected him."

"I'm going!" growled Delaney, tearing his eyes away from Loris and glancing through the curtains. "I'm right after him, Chief. I won't stop till I get him, either."

"If you don't make it in thirty minutes," said Drew glancing sharply at his watch, "if you

don't make it by then—come back here. Perhaps something will have turned up in the meantime. Get that?"

"Sure, Chief! Good-by!"

Delaney had passed through the portières, crossed the reception room and pressed aside the tapestries leading to the hallways, before Drew stepped to the broad doorway and motioned for Loris and Nichols to take their former positions. He waited until they were seated with their faces in the shadow cast by the overhead silken hangings. He spoke then, and to the point.

"This case," he said, thrusting his hands in his coat pockets and striding back and forth. "This case is clearing clue by clue. The trouble-man, whom some one let into the house this afternoon, is the missing link in the chain of circumstance and applied deduction. Who let him in?"

"I did!"

Drew stopped in his stride. "You, Nichols?" he questioned sharply. "Why did you let him in?"

"Because I asked Harry to," defended Loris with heat. "I heard the bell ring. I sent the maid downstairs. She came back and told me that a man from the telephone company was waiting to look over the connections. She said

that he said that there was trouble with the wires."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Drew; "that is," he added hastily, "I don't believe there was anything the matter at all. In the light of what Delaney has told me, that fellow came here last night, when some one else named Frosby or Frisby was sent. Now why would he want to take another's place? For one reason only—the same reason that he came here this afternoon. This reason concerns your future health and security. We had one death in this house which followed his first visit. We don't want anything to happen after his second visit."

"You are right, Mr. Drew," said Nichols. "I was careless. I went down stairs and talked with the fellow. It was just a few minutes after I arrived from downtown. He seemed so plausible that I asked the Central Office Detective at the door, who gave the permission. It was all my fault, I guess."

"Where did this fellow go? What did he do in the house?"

"He went into the library and tested the phone there. The connection seemed to be all right. Then he went down stairs and tested the butler's 'phone. The butler had been taken as a material witness by Fosdick. I followed the man. He didn't do anything but test and

then talk with Franklin Official—I think it was."

"Are you sure he talked over the phone? It's ridiculously easy for a person to hold down the hook and make believe they are talking to most anybody."

"I don't know about that, Mr. Drew," said the captain, turning toward Loris. "Did he talk to anybody when he used this 'phone, Miss Stockbridge?"

"I believe so, Harry. I really thought he did."

Drew furrowed his brows in perplexity. There was no evidence shown that the trouble-man had ever talked with anybody, via wire, from the mansion. He recalled the first appearance of the lineman in the library. That time both calls, to Central, might have been feigned by holding down the hook and speaking into a disconnected transmitter. The man was clever. He knew all there was to be known concerning telephony.

"I'm a child," the detective concluded, swinging about the room in perplexity. "One thing," he added aloud to Loris and Nichols. "One thing! We are absolutely alone in this part of the house. I have locked the maid in her room. No one can get through the door to the hall. There's a spring lock on it. Delaney closed it when he went out."

"And there's a score of detectives scattered about," said the captain reassuringly, as he leaned toward Loris. "Why should we fear anything at all?"

"I wouldn't, Harry," said Loris, "if it wasn't for what happened to poor father. Mr. Drew took the same precautions and had everything locked and watched. It doesn't seem as if we were in New York at all. It seems like some mediæval time and place."

Drew reached for a fragile-looking chair, turned it, sat down and thrust his custom-made shoes out across the rug in the direction of Loris and Nichols, whose faces shone white and drawn in the soft light of the alcove where they were seated.

Swirling thought surged through the detective's brain. He went over the case with dulled understanding. Briefly, he had eliminated the former suspects and compressed the matter into a small compass. His conclusion brought him to his feet with slow swaying from side to side. Some one in state prison was probably directing matters. Some one in New York was carrying out the arch-fiend's orders. This free agent had the nerve of the damned and the cunning of Cagliostro. He had succeeded in planting a confederate in the mansion, or entering himself, and slaying Stockbridge. The entire case, concluded Drew, rested in capturing the free agent

before he could do further murder. Loris was marked and had been from the first.

"What servants remain?" he asked, dropping his hand on his right hip pocket and feeling the bulge of an automatic there. "Which of the servants, Miss Stockbridge, have Fosdick and his men left for you?"

"The French maid," said Loris softly.

"I saw her! She looks all right. She says she has been with you five or six years."

"Six—almost. It's been over six years, Mr. Drew!"

"That ought to let her out of the case. Now, the next one?"

"The housekeeper, Mrs. Seeley. She has been with us ten or twelve years—ever since I can remember. Mother thought the world of Mrs. Seeley."

"Who else?"

"Father's valet. They didn't arrest him."

"He was down to my office. He looks all right. I'll cross him off the list of suspects. Now, are there any more servants in the house?"

"There's a French chef and a pantry man, I think. Also there's a poor old darkey who tends to the furnace. I don't believe he leaves the basement. I never see him, only on holidays."

"The butler, then, and the doorman and the second man and the rest of the servants have

been taken down to Center Street for interrogation and as suspects. That leaves us with very few to handle, Miss Stockbridge. I'm going to start by securing the door which leads into the hallway. Then we'll wait here."

Drew hurried through the tapestries, stopped, and examined the lock of the door before he shot home a second bolt which was functioned by a butterfly of heavy gold alloy. He stood erect with both hands pressing at his temples. It came to him with double force that the same precautions had been taken when Stockbridge was alone in the library downstairs. There was the lock of superior make and the winged-latch. There was the two-inch, or more, door of dark wood. There were the servants and detectives both within and outside the mansion. Yet the millionaire had been reached in a secret manner through all the precautions.

"Things repeat, sometimes," mused Drew, fingering the catch and the flat key. "The same conditions bring the same results. I——"

The detective's voice trailed into a whisper as he heard footsteps outside the door. He reached back to his pocket and waited. His heart thumped like a prisoned bird within his breast. It was a case of strained nerves. He felt the responsibility of guarding Loris.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, recovering himself and

squaring his jaw. "Bah," he repeated. "It's somebody for me."

He opened the door after twisting the butterfly and turning the flat key in the lock. A blurred figure pressed forward. A gruff voice boomed from a muffling collar.

"Hello, Chief! I'm back in a half-hour! No luck, either!"

Drew waited until Delaney had removed his overcoat and overshoes, which he placed in one corner by a hall-tree. "What did you find?" he asked glancing toward the tapestries.

"The fellow's beat it for good. Landlady says he owes her one week's rent. He cleaned out with a suit-case and left this." The operative reached in his pocket and brought forth a single drill of quarter-inch diameter. He held it out. "All I could find, Chief, after a quick frisk. This was in the mattress."

"Regulation lineman's wood-bit," said Drew as he examined the size number on the shank. "This might have been the one used in boring the hole between the slot-booths at Grand Central Station."

"Then Albert is the lad, Chief?"

"We don't know, yet. There's lots of bits like this one. Did you try it for finger-prints?"

"They're all rubbed off! I had to pull it from the mattress. It was stuck in a hole near the foot of the bed."

"Hold it!" said Drew. "Hold it for evidence. Put it with your plaster casts. Now——"

"Well, Chief?"

Drew glanced at his watch. "I'm going out to that drug-store," he said. "I want to phone. I can't use the phones of this house. The wires may be tapped. You stay right by this door and wait till I get back. It won't be more than ten minutes. Go get my hat when you're putting the bit away. It's in the corner by Loris and Nichols. Tell them I'm stepping out and that you will stand guard. They might hold me. She is very nervous."

Delaney was back at the detective's side, after a clumsy stride through the tapestries. "Cute couple," he said, jerking his thumb over-shoulder toward the inner room. "They're sittin' there so close you couldn't get a sheet of paper between them. I like that colleen, Chief! She's the kind you see on them magazine covers—only prettier."

"A cat can look at a queen," quoted Drew, pulling down his hat and opening the door wide. "Be sure and lock this after me," he warned. "Lock and bolt it. Stand guard and don't let anybody in at all. I'm only going round the block."

Delaney shut the door and turned the key. He followed this action by twisting the butter-

fly. Then he drew his gun and waited, grimly alert.

Drew reached the drug-store after a brisk, lung-cleansing walk through the down-driving snow. He dropped a coin in the slot and first called up his office. Harrigan, who had remained at his post, answered for most of the operatives who were out on the case and who had 'phoned in at every opportunity.

"Get Frick at the prison," Drew shot back, after making a few notes. "Get him and tell him to call up this 'phone," Drew glanced at the number over the transmitter. "Tell him to call up Gramercy Hill 9749 and let whoever I station here, know to whom and to what number Morphy is talking in New York. Get that?"

"Sure," came back over the wires. "Sure, Chief. You want to pinch the fellow he's connecting with?"

"I certainly do," said Drew. "We can work it this way. As soon as I find out from Frick where Morphy or anybody else is 'phoning from the prison, I can get a man over there in time to make the arrest. The superintendent at Gramercy Hill will help us out if the call comes through his exchange. He can get the girl to stall for a minute or two. I'll send Delaney here to hold this end of the wire. You keep him posted as to developments. O'Toole, yes!

He's planted in the alley back of the house. He can't report. All the others are all right?"

Drew hung up with a flip of the receiver. He backed out of the booth and hurried around the corner. He reached the iron-grilled gate of the mansion with his head down and the snow seeping between his collar and his neck.

"Rotten night!" said the Central Office man at the door. "I don't think we'll hear anything from anybody. Them gunmen like the back-rooms of saloons too well to pull off a gun-play in this storm, Inspector."

"You never can tell," said Drew, shaking his coat and hurrying toward the stairway which led to Loris Stockbridge's apartment.

Delaney opened the door after a repeated knock in Morse code. He eyed his chief. He motioned toward the inner rooms. "All quiet," he said with a broad smile. "Them turtle doves sure like to be left alone."

"And you would too! Especially if you lost your only relative the night before—lost him in the way she lost hers."

The big operative gulped down the thrust. "What did you find out?" he asked in a husky whisper.

"Get your coat on. Get over to that drug-store and plant near booth—Gramercy Hill 9749. Frick, at the prison, is going to call that booth up as soon as Morphy or anybody else

there tries to get New York. If Frick gives you a number, call up the superintendent at Gramercy Hill and tell him who you are. He's on duty all night. He'll give you the address of the number, and stall the call. That'll give you time to rush to the address and grab your man."

"I'll grab him, Chief!" rumbled Delaney, reaching for his storm coat which was supposed to be fur-lined. "Leave that to me!" he added. "Jus' leave it tu me!"

Drew eyed the operative's huge hands. "I'll do that," he said with a short laugh. "Now hurry! No, wait."

"What is it, Chief?" asked Delaney in the doorway.

"If the address is downtown, or in Brooklyn, what would you do then?"

"I'd get the office, Chief, and have Harrigan rush over a man. This super at Gramercy Hill ought to be able to stall that call long enough for us to connect—with both hands and both feet."

"Go to it!" said Drew, pressing Delaney out through the door. "Good luck," he added as he twisted the key and shot the bolt. "Now we are getting there," he said softly. "Unfortunately for that devil up-the-river, he has to phone from *one* place. That's the thing which will beat him. I hate to think what would hap-

pen if he was outside giving orders. He could get away with it, nicely."

Drew never felt surer of himself in a case. He tested the lock and bolt for a second time. He draped the tapestries and strode into the sitting room with his shoulders held back—a sanguine light in his olive eyes.

"Well, Miss Stockbridge," he said, pausing in the center of the room and smiling. "I think we are on the verge of big things. The attempt cannot be made to-night without we have plenty of warning."

"Good!" exclaimed Loris, standing upright and arranging her lavender gown about her slipper-tops. "That's the best news I've heard in a long time, Mr. Drew," she added, glancing archly at the detective, beneath her dark lashes. "Has that Mr. Delaney found any one?"

Drew raised his brows. Loris' question was not exactly a compliment to the big operative, who meant so well.

"He hasn't found anything," said Drew, with soft, pleasing voice. "He hasn't done that, but I'm venturing my future reputation that he will find our man—the trouble-man perhaps."

Harry Nichols stepped to Loris' side. "We were children there," he admitted frankly. "At least I was. I never suspected him at all. His manners were so pleasant. He seemed so weak and intent about his business."

"Ah!" said Drew, raising his finger. "That's it! He was intent about *his* business. Only, this particular business concerned the taking of a human life in cold blood. Mr. Stockbridge was murdered by this fiend, in the guise of a harmless trouble-hunter. How the murder was accomplished and by what lethal method we do not know. I'm acting on the theory that if we catch the man we will find out how it was done. If I can't make him—Fosdick, Commissioner of Detectives, will. May God help him if he doesn't talk to Fosdick!"

"But can't we find out how father was killed?" asked Loris, with tears glazing over her eyes. "It don't seem—it don't——"

The captain caught Loris about the waist and led her to the divan in the alcove. She sank down with her face covered with her hands. Soft sobs, brought to her throat by the memory of the murder, caused Drew to pace the rugs with alert, nervous strides like a man who would guard her from some menacing shadow. He went to the ventilators and closed them slightly. He crossed the room to the radiator-boxes and set them in an open position. He adjusted a thermostat on the wall, to seventy degrees. He stood back then and listened with both ears strained for outside sounds.

Snow sifted across the curtain-drawn panes with a cutting of fine diamonds against dia-

monds. A wind whistled and moaned and swirled over the turrets and towers of the mansion. An echo lifted from the driving traffic of the Avenue. Below this echo, so faint it seemed like a murmur of a distant sea, the city throbbed with the shifting of the whimpering wind. Once it roared. Then afterward there was silence, save for the sifting snow, and Loris' low, throat choke from welling sorrow.

She sat up finally and dried her eyes. "I should be ashamed of myself," she said, brokenly. "I must be brave. I fear something, though. It seems to be in the room or the air. What is it I fear, Mr. Drew?" Her question was vague. Her eyes shone hectically bright and strangely alluring to the detective.

"There's nothing to fear!" he declared with a direct glance. "I'm armed! Then," he added as an additional encouragement. "Then, Mr. Nichols is a soldier! You are in safe hands, believe me!"

Harry Nichols bowed politely. "I've got a gun, myself," he admitted candidly. "It's not that little one, either. It's army regulation. It, or the ones like it, have been stopping the Huns. I guess we'll take care of anything that comes up to-night, Mr. Drew. It's getting late, isn't it?"

The detective glanced at his watch. "I ought to hear from Delaney," he said, replacing the

watch and reaching for a chair. "Delaney is like old Dobbin—faithful and slow."

Drew sat down, pulled at the knees of his black trousers and rested his heels on the thick soft pile of a Persian rug. Behind him was the cheval glass and the telephone stand. Before him, and in the shade of the silk draperies, Loris' eyes glowed alongside the captain's resolute face.

The minutes passed with the trio in the same position. The snow sifted across the cold panes. The wind whined. Suddenly between gusts, Loris asked point-blankly:

"Do you suspect that man, Morphy?"

"Yes; I do!" said Drew with a snap. "I believe that every single lead we have points to him. I believe he planned to destroy your father ever since the day of conviction. I believe——"

"But he is in prison."

"Ah!" said the detective, with bright eyes. "So is his master, Lucifer, in the lower regions. He's there, but he has a long arm. Morphy's tool in this affair is probably the telephone repair-man. You saw him. Mr. Nichols saw him. I saw him. We all agree that he does not look the part of a scoundrel and a scoundrel's tool. But," Drew paused and spread out his hands; "but," he continued, "that's the reason he was chosen for Morphy's murderous work. You

can't send a thug into a drawing room—or a library. You can't cut a sharp slice with a dull tool. This trouble-hunter is all that the name implies—a hunter of trouble. I don't doubt that we have the case rounded up, save for bringing him in. Morphy, we can get at any time. He's in prison and he's getting very close to the little green door that leads to the electric-chair. One slip to-night, and we have him!"

"Miss Stockbridge must go south after the funeral," said Nichols. "She can't be jeopardized! She is nervous and has suffered acutely. I for one am sorry we let her stay here. It is the place she should not be. They know where to look for her!"

"They're beat to-night," assured Drew, rising and stretching his arms. "My! my!" he added, "this is slow, sleepy work. I'd ask for tea, but I think it's best we stay locked in here. Don't you, Miss Stockbridge?"

"Marie can get some. There's a service-waiter running up to her room. Suppose I order tea, or coffee, and cakes. It might cheer us up?"

Drew held out a warding arm as Loris rose and started toward the writing room. "I'll tend to it," he said. "You stay right here close up to Mr. Nichols. We're taking no chances at all."

The detective parted the portières and knocked upon the maid's door as he turned the key with his left hand. He waited as she gave the order through a silver-plated speaking tube. He heard the service-waiter rising. He leaned forward and took the tray with a sharp glance about the maid's room. It was as clean and as neat as a work basket. A French novel, with a vivid portrait of a poilu carrying a very sharp bayonet on its cover, lay in the center of a white counterpane on the bed.

"Good-night!" he said as he closed and carefully locked the door. He reached downward and caught up the tray. He started across the writing-room. He paused in its center as he heard:

"Burrrr! Burrrr! Burrrrr!"

Shrillingly the perfumed air of the suite vibrated with the silver notes of the telephone. Drew hesitated, with the tray balanced in his hand. He took one step forward as Loris swished across the sitting-room, lifted the hard-rubber receiver and voiced a soft, "Hello!"

Drew let go of the tray and sprang forward. He parted the portières and watched Loris' face. It changed between seconds to a flushed mask of crimson-fear. She staggered back, dropped the receiver, and cried "Harry!" as she sank to the floor.

Drew darted across the rugs and snatched up

the instrument. He heard a low, chuckling laugh that died to a whisper and then to nothingness. He flipped the receiver back on the hook. He turned with a savage twist. He stared across the room toward Loris, who had risen to her knees and whose head was against Nichols' olive-drab breast.

"What was said?" he questioned sharply.

A mass of turbaned, midnight-hued hair uncoiled and fell about the girl's white face. Glorious eyes dulled, then glowed, with the fire which was pulsing within her. Her lips trembled and went blanched as she throated brokenly:

"The man—the man at the other end said. . . . He said that his master had ordered my coffin. . . . He said that I had only a few hours to live. . . . He said that he would call me up again. . . . For me to be ready then, to meet my Master and my—doom."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"A SILENT PRISONER"

LORIS STOCKBRIDGE finished speaking with a low sob which went straight to the detective's heart. He advanced across the room and ran his arm about her supple waist. "We'll help her to the divan," he told Nichols. "That's it! Right over here and in the corner. She's all right. I'll tend to that threat which came over the wires."

Drew backed away and turned toward the telephone. He eyed it with cold calculation. He took one step further, then wheeled and glanced at Nichols.

"I want to trace that call if it is humanly possible," he said with decision. "We can find out, at least, from where it came. Suppose you leave me here with Miss Stockbridge, and you go down stairs and around to the drug-store?"

Loris rested her weight on one elbow. She sat erect, with slowly widening eyes. Her hands strayed to her hair and pressed it back from her ears. She gained command of herself after a shudder had passed through her slender body. She half rose.

"I've heard that voice before!" she exclaimed, pointing toward the 'phone. "It was familiar, Mr. Drew. Now where have I heard it?"

"Some friend of your father's?"

"No, I don't think it was. But I've heard it in this house."

"A servant—the valet?"

"No! No, Mr. Drew, it wasn't the valet's voice. It was whispering and consumptive. It squeaked. It sounded like a little boy's voice."

"How about that trouble-man?" Drew advanced with keen steps. He felt that he was very close to the truth.

"It might have been. Only—only, Mr. Drew, it was younger—thinner—squeakier. It was a terrible voice. It rings and rings in my ears. It was so sure!"

"Ump!" declared Drew with clenched fists. "It won't be so sure," he said, squaring his jaw. "It won't be near so sure, next time. I think it was that trouble-man you heard. Don't you remember anything he said when he was in the house, for comparison?"

"I just heard him say—I heard him say that the connections, I think he called them, were all right. Then he went away, Mr. Drew."

"Did his voice squeak then?"

"It was rather low—like a boy's or a girl's. He seemed too polite. He had his cap in his

hand." Loris stopped speaking and stood erect. She arranged her gown and glanced down at Nichols. "I feel stronger," she said bravely. "I wonder what became of that tea?"

Drew stepped into the writing-room and found the tea-pot upon its side. He poured from this a cup of tea which he carried to Nichols. "Just taste it," he ordered. "I want to be sure it isn't doped or anything like that. That's it. Just a small swallow. It's all right, isn't it? It isn't bitter?"

Nichols handed the cup to Loris. "Drink it," he said with confidence. "That's good tea—only a little cold."

Drew took the empty cup and set it down on a small table. "You'll go for me?" he asked Nichols. "I want it traced without using the wires of this house. They might be tapped."

"Be back in ten minutes!" said the captain at the tapestries, after Loris had nodded. "Whom shall I ask for at Gramercy Hill?"

"The superintendent—Jack Nefe! If he isn't there, get the chief operator. Delaney will attend to that. Find out from what number the call came. We might get that whispering devil right away."

"I believe it was the trouble-man," said Loris, as Drew returned after locking the door to the hallway. "Now that I think of it—I'm al-

most sure it was. He just tried to change and lower his voice—that was all."

"Lower it?"

"Yes, Mr. Drew. It was so faint that I hardly heard it at first. He seemed afraid of something. Perhaps somebody was in the room where he was telephoning."

"That might have been. Well—he can't hurt or harm you that way. The thing is for you to keep up your courage. Fear is a terrible thing if you would let yourself be mastered by it. It might be their game to break you down by a series of threats."

"I won't do that. I've Harry and you to stand by me!"

Drew pulled out his watch. "It's getting toward midnight," he said. "No word yet from Delaney or any of the others on watch. I think that the storm will clear soon. You can go to bed. Harry—Mr. Nichols and I'll get a deck of cards and keep watch out here. We'll do sentry duty. He's used to that!"

Loris glided about the room. She stopped at the cheval glass and arranged her hair with a series of twists that formed a turban secured by loops. She swished around and glanced archly toward Drew. Their eyes met bravely. Hers dropped under shading lashes.

"I'm all right," she whispered with a half laugh. "I did look awful. It was the shock of

hearing that terrible man. How childish to call me up and say what he did. He didn't mean it!"

"Ah," said Drew, reaching in his pocket and bringing out a key. "Ah, he did mean it, I think. He has overreached himself by telephoning. Gramercy Hill Exchange is on the alert. There's Mr. Nichols with good news, at the door. Now for his report."

The captain came in, brushing snow from his olive-drab uniform. He glanced at Loris as he strode across the room and took her hand with a firm grip. "Delaney," he said confidentially, "was right at the booth. He was sitting on a chair, propped up and talking with the prescription clerk. He did the telephoning to Gramercy Hill. I don't know who he got there, but they already knew about the call."

Nichols turned toward Drew for confirmation.

"That's right!" the detective exclaimed. "They should know! The vice-president, Westlake, has left orders to record all calls to this house. Where was that whispering voice from, Mr. Nichols?"

"From Forty-second Street and Broadway."

"Close!" exclaimed Drew, rubbing his hands. "The fellow took chances."

"It came from a slot-booth in a cigar store in a big building. It only lasted two minutes. The

operator at Gramercy Hill says the first voice she heard, asking for Gramercy Hill 9764, was harsh and loud. I don't understand that."

"Harsh and loud," repeated Drew, toying with his watch chain. "That's odd. Was it the same man that Miss Stockbridge heard?"

"The operator don't know. Delaney says maybe there were two of them. One, who called up, and one who talked to this room." Nichols turned and nodded toward the silver-plated telephone.

"Hardly possible," mused Drew. "I think he changed his voice after he got the connection. He didn't want Miss Stockbridge to recognize him."

Loris glanced at the two men. "What will they do?" she asked anxiously. "Will Mr. Delaney and the other detectives catch him by that call?"

"Hardly," said Drew. "He was in and out within three minutes. The bird has flown from there!"

"But where will he go?"

"I don't know, Miss Stockbridge. I wish that I did know. There are over a hundred thousand telephones in New York he could use. It's impossible to guess which one. The booths at the Grand Central are covered by one of my operatives. The telephone company is on the alert for all calls to this house. All they can

do is to record them and tell us what happens after it happens. We are trying now to get this whispering dog when he is compelled to wait at a booth. If Morphy 'phones him from the prison to-night we have him. The telephone company is going to delay the call after getting the number. It would look natural. Then, we can strike at the booth or place where the call is directed in time to catch the man Morphy is telephoning to. Up to now, Morphy has not 'phoned or Delaney would have said something about it."

"But can't you stop these calls?" asked Loris.

"Very easy. We could order the wires disconnected. But then we wouldn't catch our man. He would be suspicious and wait for another time."

"The whole thing seems so strange, Mr. Drew. We're locked in here. The house is so well guarded. All they can do is 'phone and yet we —at least I am nervous. Why have I got that strange feeling?"

"From experience!" declared Drew. "If we knew how your poor father was killed there wouldn't be cause for worry. We don't know. It was so subtle that we are confronted with the unknown in terrible form. You feel a shadow and so do I. A reaching shadow about this splendid house of yours. It isn't anything we

can grasp and say, 'Come here! You're under arrest.' It's the uncanny mystery of the entire case that holds us three on the ragged-edge. I confess I have not been myself since last night. The powers of darkness and Lucifer, himself, have nothing on the people we are fighting."

"How about running Morphy in the guard house, or whatever they have up there?" asked Nichols. "Why not lay the case before the warden and have him put out of harm's way? That's what they'd do in the Army!"

"We can't prove a single thing on him!" declared Drew. "He used the 'phone—once or twice. Perhaps he has permission from the superintendent of state prisons to do so. He has business interests which require his telephoning, we'll say."

"Then we're just going to wait right here?" asked Loris, stamping her slipper. "Wait right here and let them do their worst?"

"The city detectives would do the same thing I'm doing," said Drew on the defensive. "They'd trap their men. Do you want to see the man or men who slayed your father, escape? He will, or they will, unless we give them enough rope to hang themselves."

"Or wire!" said Nichols cheerfully. "No, Loris, Mr. Drew is right. He's done everything. All we have got to do, is wait. Let's sit down

for a little while. Delaney said he might have word soon."

Drew waited until Loris had pressed herself into a small compass at the back of the divan, with Harry Nichols leaning over her in a shielding position which was thoughtful and at the same time affectionate. He strode toward the writing room and parted the heavy, silk portières. He studied every detail. He dropped the portières and crossed the sitting room to the doorway leading into Loris' chamber. This, too, he searched with his eyes. Backing to the center of the room he dropped his chin in thought. A sound outside the mansion caused him to turn and hurry to a window. He brushed the curtain aside and tried to peer out. He rubbed the frosted glass vigorously. His nose pressed to a white button as he searched the side street. A taxi had come to a grinding halt directly below the window. Its wheels spun upon the slippery surface. A man leaned out of an open doorway and urged the driver on with a brandished fist of ham-like proportions. The driver backed into the snow, dropped into first speed and stepped on his throttle. The taxi leaped forward, gripped the surface, and plowed toward Fifth Avenue in a welter of flying ice and flakes.

Drew sprang back and faced Loris and Nichols who had risen and were standing together

in the glow from the cluster over their heads.

"What happened?" they asked in unison. "What was outside?"

"Delaney!" snapped Drew, dragging out his watch and glancing at it. "Delaney's got word where to find his man. He's on the trail at last! It's twelve-two. We ought to have that fellow in a half hour."

"The trouble-man?" asked Loris, with rising hopes. "Do you think it is the trouble-man, Mr. Drew?"

"Nine chances in ten, it is! I'm venturing a guess it is. If we get him—if Delaney gets him—he'll know it. Delaney used to work under the old-time police chiefs. They showed scant consideration."

"But, he won't hurt him!" said Loris, with a tremulous exclamation.

"That murderer! Why, Miss Stockbridge, isn't he plotting to slay you? Didn't he kill your father? I wish I were in Delaney's place."

"Me too!" declared Nichols, drawing closer to the detective. "Say, Inspector, I want to congratulate you. I do."

"Wait, Harry. Just wait! You two sit down and be quiet. This affair is a personal one with me. I don't doubt that Morphy or perhaps some one else in state prison 'phoned to the same party who phoned Miss Loris. That was all we needed. Delaney jumped into a taxi

and hurried downtown as fast as the storm permitted. Perhaps the call came from the same booth. I don't think so, though."

"The one at Forty-second Street and Broadway?"

"I don't think so, Nichols. This fellow seems to pick a new one every time. He's very crafty. That alone shows a criminal mind."

Drew paced the floor with soft gliding. He turned at the portières and crossed to the tapestries. He returned and stood before Loris and Nichols.

"Captain," he said, "we can now begin to reconstruct this case. We can get some of the dead-wood from our minds. It is apparent to me that one of Mr. Stockbridge's sworn enemies —Morphy, for instance—confined in state's prison, set about to slay both members of the family. He secured a confederate whom he knew. This confederate has never been arrested in the state. We have that from the finger prints in the booth at Grand Central. We will presume that this confederate is the troubleman. He is probably an expert electrician. He either tapped in on the wires the night Mr. Stockbridge was murdered or got behind the switchboard and called up the library 'phone."

"The switchboard?" asked Loris. "You mean the big place where the girls are?"

"Not exactly there. The wires run down and

are tagged. It would be possible for him to cut in somewhere between the switchboard and the conduits. Now I don't know how it was done. There's several ways. But wherever he tapped in, he must have used a magneto to ring Mr. Stockbridge up, and afterwards a battery-set to do the talking. All this Westlake says it would be necessary to do, so that the operator would not notice a permanent signal on the board."

"What was his object?" asked Nichols.

"To cover himself. He first disconnected the wires and waited till I sent for a trouble-man. Frosby, or Frisby, was sent. The trouble-man took his place. He came here and looked the place over. He lied to Mr. Stockbridge and I when he told us about that tall German in the alley. If there was such a man there before the snow froze we would have his footprints."

"You haven't them?" asked Loris.

"No. Delaney has a set made by this trouble-hunter when he was at the junction-box. This must have been the time he either cut the connections so that I would send for him, or it was the time when he called up and threatened Mr. Stockbridge with death within twelve hours. You remember that the telephone company have no record of the call. Now the next call——"

"Was there another?" the girl asked.

"Yes—to your father at or about the moment he died. That was from the Grand Central Sta-

tion at Forty-second Street. There's a good record of that. Your father knocked the telephone down when he dropped dead. The operator noticed that the connection was open and put on the howler. The record is clear on that."

"But what is all this twisting and turning for?"

"To throw us off, Miss Stockbridge. We're dealing with a crafty, cunning mind. This mind took the extreme precaution of connecting two booths at Grand Central so that a man in Sing Sing could talk to your father without leaving a record at the Westchester Exchange or at Gramercy Hill Exchange. How this was done I don't know. It could be done with auxiliary batteries and looping so that the Gramercy Hill operator thought the Westchester call was to a slot booth, while another call from the next booth to this house was really the same connection shunted or looped through. Westlake, vice-president of the telephone company, says that there would be several ways of doing this. He added it would take an expert in telephony."

"I'm all twisted up, Mr. Drew. I suppose you understand it. But what about that call to-night—the one that frightened me?"

"The man was sure of himself!" said Drew without thinking. "He has his plans made. He figures they will not fail!"

"Oh, you mean——"

"I mean, Miss Stockbridge, that he expects to slay you in the same manner your father was slain. We have this advantage. You are not alone in this room or these rooms. Your father was alone. The murderer will have Mr. Nichols and myself to deal with this time! Be calm."

"But—I don't see how he could—get in here?"

"Nor do I. The point is that he got into the library and out again without trace. He had an hour to do his work in. Here, he is running every risk."

"But he has already been here, Mr. Drew."

The detective glanced keenly at Nichols, who had shot the statement straight through clean white teeth.

"I know it," Drew said with a trace of anxiety in his voice. "That is disquieting. But we have searched these rooms and found absolutely no trace of tampering with locks or ventilators or window-catches."

"Could he climb up here? He might have climbing irons," added Nichols glancing toward the windows.

"A good porch-climber could do it," Drew mused, with his eyes sweeping the curtains. "A very good one could. There are only three or four good ones out of prisons. They never go in for murder."

"Wouldn't money buy them?" asked Loris.

"Mr. Morphy may have retained one—with some of the gold he stole from poor father."

"Retained," repeated Drew, turning with sudden intentness. "Retained, is hardly the word, Miss Loris. Hired, is more to the point. Hired assassins are not uncommon. We have the Becker case and the Hope murder. We have——"

Drew allowed his voice to trail to a whisper. "We have," he declared, "our man! There's the front door bell! It's Delaney!"

"You have splendid ears, Mr. Drew."

"I have to have, Miss Stockbridge. Now," he added sharply, "you and Mr. Nichols go into the library—the writing room. I think the case is closing. There may be a little excitement if Delaney's got that fellow. I, for one, am not going to stand much from him. Please go into the other room. That's right. Stand there, Harry, in case we need a soldier!"

Drew advanced step by step toward the tapestries. He lifted his gun from his hip pocket, examined it with narrowed eyes, then replaced it loosely. He brushed the curtains aside and had the key out, as heavy steps shook the upper stairway and a knock sounded on the panels of the door.

"Who's there?" asked Drew.

"Delaney, Chief!"

"All right! Just a moment."

The detective glanced through the slit in the tapestries, saw that Nichols and Loris were across the room, then twisted the butterfly-latch, at the same time he thrust in the flat key and turned the lock.

The door swung open. Delaney's huge bulk blocked the way. He half turned, cursed savagely, and clutched a pipe-stem neck with rude fingers. "Come along, you!" he boomed. "Get in there!"

The form of a man hurtled by Drew, fell and rose, then fell again beyond the tapestries in the center of the sitting room. Drew, like some lithe cat, was over him with a drawn gun. Delaney puffed across the rugs and tried to speak as the detective leaned and studied the chalk-pale face below shielding cuffed hands which were raised impotently.

"The trouble-man!" exclaimed Loris fearsomely.

A Central Office detective slouched through the door, deposited a kit of lineman's tools on the floor near the tapestries, then retired discreetly.

"It's him!" said Drew. "Please get back, Miss Stockbridge. We're going to fix this fellow."

"Oh, please don't strike him."

"Please—Miss Stockbridge. I'll promise

nothing in this connection. This is the man who foully murdered your father."

Loris shrank back and against Nichols' extended arm. Drew glanced at her with swift concern. He dropped his eyes to the man at his feet. "What happened?" he asked Delaney. "Has this fellow said anything? Done any talking?"

Delaney glared at the trouble-man. "Never a word has he said, Chief. He's a clam. But——"

"What's that? Go on, Delaney!"

"Why, Chief, I wouldn't have brought him here if he hadn't said to Morphy over the 'phone that *'it'* was fixed in her room. Now what does he mean by that *'it'?*"

"We'll find out!" declared Drew, dropping to the prisoner's side.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"THE PRISONER SPEAKS"

THE detective wasted no time searching the trouble-hunter's pockets. His skilled fingers drew forth two envelopes, a note book and a small roll of money, the least of which was ten-dollar bills and the greatest, on the inside, spread out to three staring noughts and a one in front of these.

"One thousand and sixty dollars!" said Drew dryly, handing the roll to Delaney. "This fellow's well heeled. Perhaps for a get-a-way. Take that. Now here——"

Drew tapped the envelopes with his fingers, spread them open and removed their sheets of closely-written paper.

"First letter," he announced with raising brows, "is from Standard Electrical Co., of Chicago, recommending Albert Jones as a capable electrician. I don't doubt it. He's capable of most anything."

Delaney took the letter and waited with his eyes fastened upon the silent figure who had not revealed his identity from the time of the arrest.

"Second letter," continued Drew, "is addressed to Albert Jones, General Delivery, New York Post Office. It is from Ossining. It is signed Mortimer Morphy. How careless," said the detective, rising in his excitement. "How *very* careless! It goes on to say that everything is all right. That the appeal is pending with the governor. That uncle Monty was expected to die and that aunt Lou was very low."

Drew paused and glanced toward Loris and Nichols. "You know what that means?" he asked. "Uncle Monty was Mr. Montgomery Stockbridge and aunt Lou would figure out for you, Miss Stockbridge. Keep this, Delaney. We're going to convict this man right here—whether he talks or not. This letter was written to him two months ago. It shows premeditation."

"He looks ill," said Loris. "His face is so white."

"Dope!" snapped Drew, pressing down the prisoner's right eye-lid and glancing at the pupil. "A narcotic of some kind shows in the small iris. It's like a pin head. Yen she, eh, Delaney?"

"Guess it is, Chief. Frisk his cap and belt. They carry it there, sometimes."

Drew started at the prisoner's hair and went over his entire body with careful fingers. A bulge, at the waist, resolved itself into a cham-

ois money-belt which contained five cartridges, a small handful of electric fuses and a spool of fine wire.

Drew eyed this last with furrowed brow. He pocketed it finally and studied the cartridges.

"Twenty-two, cupronickle, center-fire," he announced with a hard smile. "That forges another chain. We're getting there. He was loaded for something, Delaney."

"Sure and he was. Look at those handcuffs, Chief. I made them tight as I could."

Drew handed up the cartridges and fuses and rattled the cuffs. The prisoner protested by turning partly over. His eye-lids fluttered and opened full upon Loris. She shrank back between the curtains. Her hands went up to her face in voiceless fear. "Please keep away," said Drew. "This man is always dangerous. I want to trim his claws before I take any chances with him. Delaney," he added, "get my overcoat and bring me those plaster-casts. This case grows interesting. I wonder who the fellow is? 'Albert Jones' doesn't convey much. He is a friend and tool of Morphy. Poor Morphy! I wonder what he'll say when the governor gets this evidence? He's buried now for twenty long years of penal service. He picked a good tool, though. A smart man!"

The prisoner did not brighten to any extent under the professional flattery. His eyes closed.

The cuffed wrists dropped down upon his chest. He breathed slowly as Drew took the overcoat Delaney brought, and found the photos of the finger prints which Fosdick and the expert at headquarters had both declared were not on record.

"A little ink," Drew said to the operative. "We'll smear this fellow's thumb and see if his print answers to the print I found in the booth at Grand Central. I'll venture that it does."

Nichols extended a fountain pen which the detective opened, sponged on the corner of a handkerchief, and returned with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"Ah," he said, gripping the prisoner's hand and smearing a thumb with a rolling motion across the back of the print. "Ah, Delaney, see here. The same whorls and loops. The same tiny V-shaped scar. One, two, three—center right. This is the man. We have him deeper in toward the place with the little, green door. He knows what I mean!"

The prisoner's lips closed to a thin, hard line. A tiny spot of hectic fire burned in the center of each cheek as Drew completed the searching and rose.

"Foot-prints, now!" he said with a snappy order. "Compare those plaster casts you took at the junction-box back of this house. Are they the same? There's a series of four screw

holes in his rubber-heels, Delaney. Do they compare with the casts. Measure them!"

"Sure and they do," said the big operative, rising and pointing to the small projections. "This lad, Chief, was the only one around that junction-box till after the snow froze and drifted over. That's my idea, Chief. It caught him, didn't it, Chief?"

"Every little helps to forge the chain," Drew said. "He's in bad now. His only chance is to tell us what he knows about Morphy? What was said over the telephone wire? What did Frick say?"

"It was this way, Chief," Delaney said. "I'm waiting talking with the drug-clerk when there's a ring on the slot-booth 'phone. It's Jack Nefe at Gramercy Hill. He says to me that Frick had just 'phoned and said that Morphy had come out of the guard room, looked around, then, after chinning with a keeper at the front gate, he had started going over a telephone book for a number. Nefe said for me to hold the wire. Then I gets a number, Chief. It's Gramercy Hill 11,678. Nefe said that was a booth in the new Broadway Subway at Forty-first Street. I piles into a cab and arrives there just as this fellow had finished boring a hole between the two booths—11,678 and 11,679. I waits behind a slot-machine. Some one rang up when he coupled the wires, listens, then asks

Gramercy Hill central for this 'phone here in Miss Stockbridge's room. You see the game, Chief?"

"Go on!" said Drew. "Be very clear!"

"This fellow was connecting Morphy at state prison with this house through the two slot booths. I sneaked up and waited for him to finish. He's busy with a pair of pliers. I falls on him like a ton of bricks. Then after I get the cuffs on, I listens in. It's Morphy roaring there, with that big bull voice of his. He's mad 'cause he gets no answer. He shouts over and over, Chief—'Bert! Bert! Bert! Is it planted in her room? Her room. Is it there?'" Delaney paused and stared about the sitting room.

"What does he mean, Chief?" he asked huskily. "What is that *'it'?*"

"Go on!" said Drew tersely.

"I got Morphy off the wire, Chief. I got Frick and then Frick got the warden. He's a good fellow. He listened to me, then he calls some guards and they drag Morphy through the prison and down to the coolers. I guess they're down in the ground, somewhere. Anyway, Chief, he's gone for good—unless they send him to the chair for his part in the murder of Stockbridge."

"He'll go! What I want to know now, Delaney, is this fellow's right name. Morphy said 'Bert,' eh?"

"Sure he did, Chief. 'Bert! Bert! Bert!' That's close to Albert. Albert Jones, like's in the letter."

"No! That would be a throw-off. He's some other kind of a Bert. Let me see his cap."

Delaney picked the prisoner's cap from the rug and passed it over to Drew. The detective examined it, ripped the silk, and looked under the lining. He straightened and handed it to Harry Nichols.

"Can you make that name out?" he asked. "Your eyes are younger than mine. Perhaps Miss Stockbridge can read it. It's Spanish, I think. 'Gusta' or 'Gasta.' The rest is obliterated with grease."

"Antofogasta!" declared Loris suddenly. "It's Antofagasta, Chile."

"Fetch the lineman's kit, the Central Office man brought," said Drew to the operative. "Put it right here by this fellow's side. I—we are getting close to the truth in this case."

Delaney hurried back with the satchel. It was the same one that Drew had seen in the library on the evening Stockbridge was murdered. It had excited no suspicion then.

"A magneto," said the detective. "First comes a ringing magneto which has seen much service. Put that over there, Delaney. Spread a paper or something. Ah," Drew added, "here's a set of small dry batteries arranged

in series. Three or four of them. I don't know just what they're for, but Bert does."

The prisoner's pale eyes blinked and were closed again as the lids compressed in wrinkled determination. He moved slightly when Drew pressed a knee against his chest. He coughed with dry catching deep down in his throat. The detective felt of his pulse. It was faint but steady—like a tired sleeper's.

"He's coming out of it," Drew said. "He'll talk after awhile. Let's see, what is this?"

Delaney leaned over the satchel. "Another link," said Drew, drawing out a telephone receiver without wires attached to it. "And here," he added, "is the testing set with the sharp clamps. That's for listening in or talking with other people's connections. I don't doubt that this fellow knows his business. Here's a micro-volt meter that registers fractions of volts. Here's an am-meter of the pocket size. I've seen this kind on automobiles for testing dry-cells. Now, what is this?"

"Looks like a full set of jimmies!" blurted Delaney. "That's a sectional jimmy!"

"He's got everything," said the detective, turning and glancing at Loris. "Here, Miss Stockbridge," he said, holding up an empty cartridge shell. "Here is the most important link in the chain against him. It's a twenty-two shell which has been fired. See—wait—what's

this, Delaney? The cap on the end hasn't been struck. The cartridge was discharged—the cap is intact. How could that be?"

Loris and Harry Nichols leaned over the detective. He turned the tiny shell around in his fingers. He sniffed it. He held it out so they could see the end. "Discharged," he exclaimed, "without touching the detonating cap on the end! That's odd! Very suggestive!"

"Let me see it," said Nichols. "I'll tell. We have exams on these things. This seems to have been fired," he continued with thought. "It's been fired without concussion. I'd say it was heat that did it. A match touched to the base here would fire the cap, which would, in turn, set off the powder. There's a different color to the brass at the cap end. It looks to me like a shell which has been clamped down by three—no, four screws. There's marks on the rim. See them, Loris—Miss Stockbridge? Right there. Right at my nail."

"That's about right, Harry!" declared Drew, reaching for the cartridge. "It was clamped down with small screws. It was ignited or set off by heat. It forms part of a home-made pistol which conforms, to a hair, with Fosdick's statement that the bullet never went through a barrel that was rifled."

"That's your own statement!" blurted Delaney. "Fosdick never had brains enough to

figure a thing out like that. All he knows is pinch everybody two or three times. I've seen him do it."

Drew eyed the prisoner. "So you see," he said softly, cuttingly, "crime does not pay. The net has closed over your head. You erred a score of times. You couldn't afford to make one little mistake. I could—I did! I've made a hundred in this case already! It's the hound and the hare. The hound loses the scent and brays on blunderingly till he picks it up again. You lost me time and again. You fooled me in that lineman's guise when you came into the library. Your make-up was perfect. You said just the right things."

The prisoner's lips curled in a thin cruel line. He rattled the cuffs defiantly. His shoulders lifted then fell back upon the rug.

"Bert!" snapped Drew. "Bert!" he repeated with awakening thought. "Delaney," he said, turning and glancing up at the operative's broad, flushed face. "I got this fellow located. What was the name of the man we tried to find in the Morphy failure? The one we had a bench-warrant for? He was indicted. The indictment was sealed. You know! It's a name you didn't like. The fellow who escaped to Rio or South America? Who afterwards went to Antofogasta. Ah, Cuthbert!"

"That's it, Chief! Cutbert! Cutbert Mor-

phy—the old devil's brother. This is him!"

Drew rubbed his hands vigorously. "It is!" he exclaimed, with his eyes swinging over the prisoner's drawn features. "Cuthbert Morphy—a brother's tool and confederate. We're getting on!"

The detective rose and faced Loris and Nichols. "Captain," he said, "a firing squad at sunrise would be the Army's answer to this man's deviltry. Consider what he has done. He's worked back to New York after a year as a fugitive. He connected in some manner with Morphy at Sing Sing. Perhaps he went there as a visitor under the pretext of business connected with Morphy's affairs. This scheme was hatched there in the prison. It was financed by Morphy. It succeeded in so far as Mr. Stockbridge was concerned. First the telephone call to the cemetery superintendent. Then followed his visit to this house for the purpose of fixing some fiendish device. Or——"

"He might have fixed the windows, Chief," suggested Delaney. "He might have opened a catch and climbed in afterwards."

"He wasn't near the windows," said Drew. "He had something else in the back of his crafty, twisted brain. He came and went out, with Mr. Stockbridge and I watching him. He called up, then, and threatened the death. He probably looped the library 'phone up with Sing

Sing at or about midnight. We have a record of both calls."

"Why," asked Loris, as Drew paused in thought. "Why did he have Morphy connected with father? I can't see, Mr. Drew, that part of it. The rest, you have told is, is very clear."

"Nor I yet," admitted the detective. "But that is a detail. It is probably the criminal's ego, which is in every one of them, to notify their prey that the hour has come. Morphy was an artist in crime. He was a master mind in finance and chicanery. What better revenge could he think of than to notify Mr. Stockbridge that death was about to strike? It savors of Machiavelli and Borgia. Whom the gods destroy they first make mad. He tried it on you."

"Gods!" blurted Delaney with ire. "Devils, you mean, Chief!"

"Yes, or worse!" said Drew, glancing sternly at the prisoner. "This fellow," he added, "is the agent for the destroyer. Now how was it done?"

Delaney glanced about the walls of the room in apprehension. "I'll take another look around," he suggested heavily. "Maybe with them new ideas we can locate something that might be planted for the killing."

Drew glanced sharply at the prisoner's face. A faint sneer was on the thin lips. The wrists

twisted and turned in the handcuffs. The steel chain rattled metallically. Loris backed step after step toward the shielding curtain and Harry Nichols. "Oh!" she said suddenly, as she dropped her head against his breast. "Oh, Harry! there can't be anything like *that.*"

"Certainly not!" Drew hastened to ejaculate. "That's nonsense. If there was anything planted in either of these three rooms, there's no one to get in and operate it. I've searched! Mr. Delaney has searched. Do you want us to search again?" Drew's lips were drawn with doubt as he stared anxiously from Loris to Nichols. "I'll do it, captain, if you say so. I think we've done enough work, however. The thing is to get this fellow to talk. I don't want to give him over to Fosdick and the third degree till we see if he is going to treat us right. He can turn state's evidence on Morphy, who blundered. Then he'll get off lightly. Morphy is the master mind."

"He only smiles," said Nichols, tapping his breast suggestively. "I've a gun here and I've a mind to use it. Do you think I want Miss Stockbridge murdered like her father was murdered? I'll shoot that cur! He's a whispering snake! A Hun!"

"Don't!" sobbed Loris, as Nichols thrust his hand in his coat and drew out a flat automatic

of .44 caliber. "Don't, Harry! Perhaps this man is innocent."

"Innocent!" declared Nichols. "Why, Loris—why, Miss Stockbridge, you don't think *that,* after all the things Mr. Drew has discovered. I'll wager my commission he's guilty as Hell, and I mean it, Loris."

"He's that!" Delaney declared. "He and his brother the devil are one in sin. They're lost spirits."

"Now everybody," said Drew, gathering in the group with his eyes, which were strangely bright. "Everybody keep very quiet for a minute. Let me think."

"Sure and I will, Chief. I'm thinking I want to think, myself."

Drew frowned at Delaney. He dropped his eyes and studied the prisoner's hands. They were strangely white and remarkably small for a man who had labored at telephone-repairing. The detective's glance rested on the ink-stained thumb. His mind swung with this thought to the foot-prints. Following the train he arrived at the first conclusion that an expert in telephony could devise most any kind of a practical method for opening a window or a ventilator. He dismissed this theory with a glance about the room. The ventilator was well-hidden and inaccessible to any one without a step-ladder. Considerable time devoted in climbing upon a

chair and a case of jade ornaments might reach it, but the trouble-man had not been alone in the room when he inspected the telephone.

Drew went over the salient details of the Stockbridge tragedy. One fact stood out. The windows had been well locked. The sashes were covered with snow. A climber, even on the face of the house, would have difficulty in springing a catch by a secret method, raising the window and entering without leaving a track of some kind. He dismissed this supposition as untenable. He turned to Delaney, fully puzzled.

"Was there a climber's set in that bag?" he asked sharply.

"I didn't see any, Chief. I don't think this fellow's a climber. He ain't built like one. His shoes are smooth on the bottom and his hands are all polished up around the nails. Looks to me, Chief, as if he might be able to pick most any kind of a lock."

"The locks are out of the question!" snapped Drew. "I examined them. They're not in line. Has anybody here any suggestions?"

Drew stared at the prisoner's drawn, white face as he asked this question. "He wasn't long in this part of the house," said the captain. "The maid watched him. She thought perhaps he might take something."

"Fosdick is to blame!" said Drew almost losing his temper. "He should have given strict

orders at the door not to let anybody in till the case was settled. It's all mixed up now. This man had ample opportunity to cover himself. A clever sneak could do most anything under your eyes without you seeing him operate. I suppose the only thing to do is to turn him over to Headquarters. He'll get his!'

Loris frowned slightly at Drew's manner. The detective did not act like his former self. She watched him pace the floor between the prisoner and the tapestries. He came back with a square set to his jaw and a hard glint in his olive eyes which gleamed like steel behind velvet.

"Stand him up!"

Delaney stared at his chief. He opened his mouth, then closed it firmly. "All right," he said, reaching down. "I'll stand him up if you let me give him an upper-cut. I don't like these silent crooks. They're snaky, Chief."

"No unnecessary violence, gentlemen," suggested Nichols as Loris laid her hand on his arm. "I'd like to have him alone for a few minutes—but outside. Go easy. Perhaps he'll talk."

"It may be your life or this man's!" gritted Drew, stepping up to the prisoner after a sharp glance at Loris. "I pity him when Fosdick gets hold of him. He'll talk then!"

The prisoner swayed with Delaney's fingers

gripping his collar in a vice-strong clutch. His white-pale face, his narrow-set eyes, his furtive glance to left and right like a cornered rat, brought Drew to mind of a man who was slowly breaking down. He lowered his brows and clutched the prisoner's elbow with strong fingers that pressed deep through the coat sleeve.

"Out with it!" he demanded harshly. "It's your last chance to save your miserable skin. You're not going to get any mercy from the Commissioner. You know what he'll do to you!"

The prisoner twisted loose from Drew's clutch. His eyes wavered as he stared at Loris for a long second, then dropped to the floor. They closed in painful thought. Suddenly he blanched with passion.

"I've no use for you coppers!" he screamed shrillingly. "I hate the sight of you and your kind. Let me go! Let me go!"

"Fine chance," whispered Delaney, tightening his grip on the prisoner's collar. "You got a fine chance, you murderin', thievin', second-story man! I'd paste you if the lady wasn't here! Sure I would, right between the eyes!"

"Easy," said Drew. "Leave him to me. He's thinking the thing over. I don't mind telling him that the magpie beat him. That and the carelessness of Morphy in calling up when he must have known that Frick was in the

front office of the prison. It's always the way, Bert. He travels the fastest, up or down, who travels alone. It's the lone star that gives us the trouble. There's nobody to peach on him!"

The prisoner bit his upper lip. A slight sign of blood showed. He tasted this with the tip of his tongue. His eyes narrowed in calculation. He turned and faced Drew with slit-lidded intentness.

"I haven't done a thing," he whispered. "You ain't got a thing on me."

"Oh, no!" blurted Drew with heat. "I ain't got a thing. I've been asleep since the time you murdered this girl's father. I've had ten men on your trail since the beginning. I don't hold the first murder so much against you as I do the projected one—which missed fire by a scant margin. You slayed a man with your devilish ingenuity, but you're not going to put it over on his daughter. I've seen to that! I notice nobody has called up and said this was the Master talking. There's a good reason."

The prisoner fluttered his pale lashes and glanced at the telephone. He closed his eyes with a smile shadowing his lips.

"There's a good reason," repeated Drew. "You are not in some booth at Forty-first Street to make the connection. Morphy is in the strongest cooler. He's booked for twenty

years. After that he'll get more. He can't help you!"

"Oh, you coppers," said the trouble-man. "Just give me five minutes and I'd show you. I don't hold anything against the girl. I never saw her before."

"You lie!"

"Why don't you take these cuffs off-a-me? I can't hit back."

"I'd sooner take the chance outside," said Drew, glancing at Loris. "I'd do it there!"

Delaney tightened his grip and half held the trouble-hunter in the air. He raised on his toes with the strain.

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Loris. "I'll have to ask you to stop this. I can't let it occur in my house!"

"Miss Stockbridge," said Drew with soft rebuke. "Miss Stockbridge, I've been in the detective business for twenty years. I never saw in that time a more dangerous man. He is the super-type who usually falls through the errors of other men. This fellow has brains. He's an expert in telephony and in wireless. There are a number of patents in the patent office under his name."

"Then he may be innocent, Mr. Drew."

"He's as guilty as the Kaiser!" exclaimed Delaney, twisting the prisoner around. "Look at him. He's been trying to murder the finest

little lady in the country. She never harmed anybody. She's devoting most of her time to Red Cross work and the—Army," added the big operative with a touch of brogue as he glanced at Nichols.

"But he has not said that he murdered father," said Loris.

"Sure an' he won't say it. I know the breed of this snake. He wants nothing used against him in the trial. He'll have the evidence of us four to show that he didn't say anything. I never saw an innocent man who wouldn't talk!"

"We're getting nowhere," objected Drew, taking command of the situation. "Take him out, Delaney, and turn him over to the Central Office bunch. They'll take him down to Fosdick!"

The prisoner lifted his manacled hands. He dropped them after a slow glance at Drew's square jaw.

"Come on!" said Delaney with a jerk backward.

"Wait!"

Drew and Nichols leaned forward. "Well?" asked the detective, as the prisoner bowed his head. "Well? Well?"

"Is that true about my brother—Morphy?"

"It is!" Drew said with ringing conviction. "It's true! He's out of this world. He's

buried alive and the key has been thrown away."

"The jig is up, then," said the trouble-man, turning toward the telephone. "Let me telephone," he said in a whisper. "I want to use it," he repeated faintly. "I'll show you how that—that Stockbridge died."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"THE VOICE ON THE WIRE"

THE prisoner lifted his manacled hands and held them toward Drew. "Let me loose," he said, "and I'll explain everything that I've done! I want it off my mind. I won't sleep until you people are satisfied. I know you—you copper! I know Fosdick—the third degree artist."

Drew frowned as he glanced at the cuffs. He scratched his dark hair and combed his fingers back toward his ears. He turned and glanced at Loris and Nichols in the opening between the two splendid rooms.

"I don't like to take a chance with this fellow," he admitted. "Do you want me to, Miss Stockbridge? It's your life he was after, and he may be shamming now. You never can trust an opium addict. They have no soul."

"I've as much as a copper's!"

"Shut up, you!" boomed Delaney, threateningly. "Shut up! There's a lady in this room!"

The prisoner clicked his cuffs together. He

stared at the cheval glass and the telephone. "A lady?" he repeated through the corner of his lips. "A limb of the Stockbridge tree," he said bitterly. "I hold nothing against her. I told you that before. But we promised the old man we'll take care of her after we killed him, and she came near going—let me tell you that. I could have killed her with twenty words."

"He's rambling," said Delaney, reaching for the prisoner. "The dope has gone to his head. I don't believe there's any——"

"Easy, Delaney," warned Drew thoroughly on the alert. "Don't make the mistake of underestimating this fellow. He acts like a man who has repented—who wants to right some of the wrong he has done. I don't think we are taking chances in letting this fellow loose. He is unarmed. I tended to that. If he wants to 'phone—let's let him."

"Your case, Chief!"

Drew reached in his pocket and brought around a police regulation revolver. "I'll have this right here!" he snapped as he slowly raised it. "You, Delaney, unlock one cuff and pass it to me. I'll wrap the chain around my left wrist. If this fellow tries anything I'll tend to his case—forever. These .44's are made for stopping purposes, eh, Mr. Nichols?"

"They certainly are, Mr. Drew. I think we

can handle that little man without trouble. What does he want to telephone for?"

"What for, Bert?" asked Drew, swinging and confronting the prisoner. "Do you want to say good-by to somebody?"

"Good-by is right," whispered the troubleman, extending his hands toward Delaney, who fished out a small key. "Yes, it's good-by to somebody. Unlock them!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Drew. "I don't like that tone. "You'll have to act better than that, Bert. What do you want to get loose for? What number do you want? I'll call up."

"No, I got to do it. I want one hand free—that's all."

Loris stepped to Drew's side. "Can there be anything about the room," she asked, "that he wants to use? Perhaps he'll pick something up and use it too quickly for you to stop him."

"I don't think so," said Drew grimly. "This gun, Miss Stockbridge, happens to have a hair trigger. We'll chance it—with your permission."

"I'm not afraid for myself—but don't you think the poor fellow should be prevented from harming himself. He acts just like a man who wanted to do something terrible. He seems to have given up hope."

"A woman's intuition," mused Drew. "Perhaps a close one," he said aloud. "You get

back into the other room, Miss Stockbridge. Let Mr. Nichols stand in front of you for protection. I'm going to grant this fellow's request. Delaney, unlock the left cuff!"

The key rattled in the tiny key-hole as Drew poised his revolver and drew a sight between the prisoner's fluttering eyelids. "Stand right there," whispered the detective tersely. "Right there," he added, reaching with his left hand and taking the cuff and chain from the operative. "Now, Bert, you're half free. What do you want with the telephone?"

The prisoner pinched his wrist and worked his hand like a hinge. A white mark, which slowly changed to red, showed where Delaney had clamped the handcuff down to its last notch. The trouble-man eyed this mark. His lips hardened. He strained on the chain as he lifted his fingers to his brow with a tired gesture.

"Hurry!" said Drew. "Hurry, Bert, or we'll cuff you up again. Do you want to telephone?"

"Y—e—s!" The voice was tremulous and dry. "Yes! I'll use it. I'll show you how that pirate—Stockbridge—was killed. The yellow squealer!"

Loris raised her chin proudly. She leaned against Nichols in the doorway. "I won't stand for that!" declared the soldier. "You are being insulted in your own house!"

"Wait, Harry! Something is going to happen! I know it is!"

"You're right, lady," whispered the prisoner. "It's going to happen to—well, I don't care. I'm done. The jig is up!"

Cuthbert Morphy shrugged his shoulders and turned toward Drew. He stared at the menacing revolver with a cryptic smile. "Get your man downstairs," he said, in hollow tones. "Get him to go in the library and call up this number. Tell Central to connect the two 'phones in this house. Shout into the library transmitter when the connection is made."

Drew frowned. "What's all that for?" he asked.

"Do as I say."

"I don't know about that. I give orders here. What do you want that done for? I thought you wanted a number on the 'phone. I thought you would get somebody on the wire who would explain everything."

"Everything will be explained, Inspector. Everything! I told you the jig was up with me. I mean it, too. There's nothing left but the truth."

Drew wound the handcuff chain tighter about his left wrist. He braced his feet and turned to Delaney. "Go downstairs," he said, "and call up this number. Do what this fellow says. The number is Gramercy Hill 9764."

Loris and Nichols lifted their brows as they turned toward each other. "I'm afraid," said the girl. "Something is not right, Harry."

"It's the only way we'll ever find out what this man means. If they take him away without letting him talk over the 'phone we'll never know. Leave things to Mr. Drew. He's armed! I'm armed! There's no danger!"

"Get downstairs to the library!" Drew ordered. "Do what this man wants. Shout into the transmitter. Go now!"

Delaney lunged through the tapestries and unlocked the door to the hall. He paused there in thought. He turned and glanced back.

"Hurry!" exclaimed Drew. "Hurry now!"

The big operative cursed audibly as he descended the two flights of carpeted steps. He nodded to the Central Office man at the library door. He passed inside, rounded the table and stood by the 'phone. He picked up the receiver. His eyes wandered along the floor as he waited. A dark spot showed on the hardwood. It was where the millionaire's blood had gushed forth from the bullet hole in the base of his brain.

"Gramercy Hill 9-7-6-4!" said Delaney with a bull's voice.

"B-r-r-r-r-! B-r-r-r-r-! B-r-r-r-r-r!" sounded from the ringing-box of the silver plated telephone in the sitting-room of Loris Stockbridge's suite.

The prisoner pulled at the chain as he leaned toward the telephone. "It's ringing," he said in a thin whisper. "Let me—let me listen in."

Drew studied the entire situation before he granted permission. Loris and Nichols were framed between the silken portières. The captain held his army regulation revolver at his hip. Loris leaned forward with her dark eyes smoldering and intent. The blood had left her cheeks. They were white and tersely set. She seemed older to Drew. He smiled reassuringly, dropped his gun to his hip, pressed it against the prisoner and shoved him toward the 'phone as a "B-r-r-r-r-" sounded above the lifting roar of Delaney's voice in the depths of the great mansion.

The room became charged and surcharged with electricity. A crackling sounded as Drew's feet glided inch by inch over the silk rug. The storm outside whined and synchronized with the rise and fall of the great voice shouting "Hello! Hello! Hello! Hello, you!"

The trouble-man turned. His hand reached upward and lifted the hard-rubber receiver from the hook. His lids fluttered toward Loris. His eyes softened with memories. "I'm glad I didn't do it!" he hissed across the room. "Good-by, lady—good-by!"

"Be careful!" snapped Drew, pressing the

revolver firmly against the prisoner's right side. "Be careful! This is a hair trigger!"

The trouble-man smiled a twisted, wan smile as he turned his head toward the transmitter and said huskily:

"Hello! Hello! You big copper! Shout on! See how loud you can curse me! That's it. That—is—it!"

Drew heard Delaney's voice rise in indignation. The taunt had spurned him to greater effort. The metallic diaphragm of the receiver roared and clicked. It echoed the voice. It stopped. It vibrated again. It reached a reed-like tune of high-pitched anger. The prisoner closed his eyes and stiffened. He pressed the receiver directly over his ear. He drew back on the chain and to one side. Drew's face darkened with suspicion. It was too late. The detective had time to spring away as a cone of lurid light and flame shot out from the telephone diaphragm and splashed across the prisoner's set face. A sharp detonation racked the perfumed air of the room. Smoke wreathed about the astonished Inspector's head, and floated upward toward the ventilator.

Cuthbert Morphy's muscles relaxed. He spun, sank to his knees, then pitched forward across the rug with a bullet in his brain. Drew untwisted the chain with a wrist flip, sprang forward toward the cheval-glass, and stamped

his foot down upon the smoking telephone receiver as if it were the head of a rattlesnake.

He turned with clear light striking out from his eyes. He nodded toward the leaning form of the girl and the erect one of the captain. He divined in seconds how the murder of Montgomery Stockbridge had been accomplished. The full series of events and clues flashed through his brain. It was like an orderly array seen at a picture show.

Cuthbert Morphy, guised as a trouble-hunter in the employ of the telephone company, had devised a single-shot pistol out of a telephone receiver and had caused it to be actuated by the human voice so that it would always strike in the most vulnerable part of man's anatomy—the ear.

With this lethal instrument he had slain the millionaire, and, when trapped and in danger of execution, he had employed the same method to bring about his own death. It was a fitting end to a life of crime and drug-brought imageries.

Delaney, with drawn gun and wild of eyes, burst through the tapestries and brought up with a dizzy lurch before the body of Cuthbert Morphy. He stammered and glared downward. He swung his heavy chin and stared at Loris and Nichols in the gloom of the further cur-

tains. He clapped Drew on the shoulder with a heavy hand.

"Had to shoot him, eh, Chief? What'd he try? What—you got your foot on?

"An electric pistol," said Drew, with a grim smile distending his olive-hued lips. "An infernal machine, Delaney. I hope it isn't a repeater. Cut that wire! Both wires! Get your knife out and cut through them, quick! I won't take any chances."

The big operative pocketed his revolver with a back swing of his right hand, brought it forward empty and ran it down his trouser pocket. He brought out a buck-horn jack-knife, pried it open, stooped and slashed through the two silk cords holding the receiver to the bottom of the transmitter which had fallen from the bracket.

Loris swayed with supple limbs. She raised her hands and pressed her unjeweled fingers against her face. She sobbed once, then turned and threw herself upon Nichols' drab shoulder. "Harry," she cried. "Oh, Harry—what happened? I didn't see what happened!"

The captain glided an arm about her waist and half-carried, half-led her to a couch in the reading-room. "Rest here a minute," he said, leaning down. "Be cool and as brave as you can. The trouble-man won't trouble you any longer. He took his own medicine!"

Nichols returned to the sitting room in time to hear Drew exclaim, after Delaney had reached down and lifted the receiver, "The case is closed! This closes it with a bang! Give me that electric pistol, Delaney!"

The operative handed it over. "Get a big rug," ordered Drew with sudden thought. "Cover that fellow over till we call the Central Office men and the coroner. I want to examine this receiver."

"Right here on this little table would be a good place," suggested Nichols, lifting off a handful of ivory ornaments and depositing them on top of a glass case. "I'll spread a paper here. I'd like to see what's inside that thing myself."

"Do you know anything about electricity or telephony?" asked Drew, as he turned the hard-rubber receiver in his hand and stared at the listening end.

"Very little, Inspector. But fire-arms are in my line and that seems to be one."

The detective nodded. "It's one, all right," he said, holding it out with a steady hand. "Looks harmless, don't it? Two binding-posts on one end. A rubber cap on the other. Notice that diaphragm."

Nichols took the receiver and squinted at the rubber cap. "By George!" he said. "This is odd. There's a tiny hole drilled or punched in

the center. It's about the same size as the bore of a twenty-two caliber revolver."

"Look at your hands!" said Drew. "What the devil," he added with dawning conviction. "Say, Delaney, do you remember that spot of black under my left ear. The one you noticed after we left yesterday morning? The——"

"Sure, Chief. That's where you got the smut —from that receiver!"

"I got it when I picked up the telephone in the library downstairs and tried to get Central. Do you remember how long she took? This is the same receiver in all probability. The trouble-hunter removed it from the library connections, loaded it, and brought it up here. It looks like any ordinary receiver. The telephone company have some with binding posts and some without. This is an earlier model."

"The spot of black was from the first discharge when Stockbridge was killed!" exclaimed Delaney.

Drew ran his fingers around the inner rim of the rubber cap. He held them up. "See!" he exclaimed. "No wonder my neck was marked. That settles that mystery, Delaney. If we had any brains at all we would have connected the soot and the telephone. If we had done that we'd have solved the case early this morning, or yesterday morning. It's after one, now!"

"This hole," said Nichols, "was the only thing in the whole dastardly scheme that could have been seen. It's the size of the end of a lead pencil. Funny you didn't notice it?"

"I looked everywhere but there," admitted Drew. "The receiver hangs with the diaphragm end down. That's the reason I didn't see it. Well—there's always a reason," he added. "Now, Delaney, fetch me that trouble-hunter's satchel. We'll see what this pistol is made of and how it is made. I venture to say that it is simple."

Delaney awoke from his stupor and lifted a rug which he tossed over the body of Cuthbert Morphy. He wiped his hands with a finite motion. He wheeled and slouched lankily across the polished floor. He returned with the lineman's kit.

"Pliers," said Drew, as the big operative removed the straps and reached his hand inside. "I saw a pair there when we had it open before," the detective added, unscrewing the rubber cap of the receiver and lifting the thin metal diaphragm from the face of two tiny magnets which were wound with fine silk wire.

"Regulation magnets," whispered Nichols, leaning over the detective's shoulder. "They're regulation except there's a hole drilled down between them. There must be a barrel all the way through the receiver."

"We'll see. Got those pliers, Delaney?"

The operative passed up a pair. "Ah," chuckled the detective, unscrewing the binding-posts and lifting off a hard rubber cap. "Ah, see here!"

Delaney rose and peered over the captain's shoulder straps. The two men watched Drew's nimble fingers trace out the mechanism of the electric pistol.

"It's simple!" declared the detective. "It's very simple and ingenious in construction. It's a crowning wonder to me that some one hasn't used this sort of device to carry out a wholesale slaughtering. Suppose they never thought of it."

Drew glanced at the silent mound under the Persian rug. "The wrong road," he whispered tersely. "He took the wrong road. He was a mechanical and electrical genius. He was a patent expert."

Delaney worked his brows up and down. "Shall I call Miss Stockbridge?" he asked.

"I'll do it," Nichols said, turning and hurrying through the portières. He returned with Loris leaning upon his arm. Her eyes were glazed and tear-laden. She held a tiny, limp lace handkerchief between her trembling fingers.

"There's no danger," said Drew. "Come here, Miss Stockbridge," he added. "I want to show you what was all ready for you."

The detective raised the hard-rubber receiver. "Here we have the diaphragm," he said, pointing. "It's a round plate of soft iron. It's secured to the rubber by an insulated ring. It is the part you press up to your ear when you listen at a telephone. There's a small hole punched in this one. The same sized hole extends down through the center core, or magnet. This hole isn't rifled. It couldn't well be rifled save with special machinery. That's why the bullet found in Mr. Stockbridge's brain was without longitudinal scorings. It was fired from a smooth-bored pistol."

"That's what you thought!" blurted Delaney with loyalty.

"I was at sea," said Drew. "Now," he continued, "we have a live cartridge at the opposite end of this core from the diaphragm. See it?" Loris leaned over the little table.

"Right here!" The detective pointed. "That is a twenty-two cartridge with a cupronickle bullet. See the cap? See how it is held from coming back by those tiny screws about the rim?"

Loris nodded and gathered up her straying hair.

"Now," continued Drew. "Now, this cartridge was exploded by the action of the human voice. Here's a tiny spiral of very slender platinum wire. It must be number forty, at

least. That's very fine! This spiral is in series with the winding about the magnets. The same current pulsated by the human voice which actuates the receiver diaphragm, also passed through this spiral. Now," Drew paused. "Now," he added with rising voice, "here is a tiny charred piece of match-head, I guess. It was set in the coil. It flared when the wire became hot. The heat was sufficient to ignite the cap. See it?"

"I see it!" exclaimed Nichols.

"The action is simple," continued Drew. "A pulsation of the current which was formed by the action of the vibrating, transmitter diaphragm, also pulsated the fine wire before it went to the receiver magnets. The louder the voice into the transmitter the more current—measured in fractions of amperes—passed through the spiral. It became sufficiently hot to flare the piece of match-head or whatever Cuthbert placed there. This flare was communicated to the percussion cap, or fulminate of mercury, at the base of the cartridge. This exploded the powder charge, which in turn projected the cupronickle bullet forward through the tube or the bore of the receiver and out through the thin, metal diaphragm, and——"

"What's that?" asked the operative.

"Out through the hole in the diaphragm,"

continued Drew, "and right into your ear or my ear, Delaney!"

"Not into mine!" exclaimed the operative. "I'll never telephone as long as I live, Chief!"

"We'll all be careful," said Nichols, turning toward Loris.

Drew gathered together the different parts of the telephone receiver. "Evidence against Morphy," he said dryly, as he dropped them into the side pocket of his coat. "They are our Exhibit A if he ever finishes that twenty years in the cooler."

Loris reached out her hand. "You saved my life," she said. "You saved it, Mr. Drew."

"I blundered and blundered and blundered on this case," admitted the detective frankly. "Now I'm going to request you to wait a few minutes before I call the coroner. Delaney has some questions. I feel sure he wants to ask me one or two."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"THE END"

TRIGGY DREW'S eyes shone with triumphant fire as he turned and faced the group gathered in the sitting room.

He adjusted his coat lapels, clicked his heels and smiled politely. His hand strayed up to his short-cropped mustache which was still neat and well-trimmed despite the labors of the day.

"Although the case is practically closed," he said with concern, "there are features which are not entirely cleared up—even in my mind. Perhaps we have a little time," he added, glancing at his watch. "Let's go into the other room—away from these memories—and have a cup of tea, if Miss Stockbridge will be so kind as to order some."

Loris glanced at Nichols. She nodded as she turned toward Drew. He moved over to the rug which covered Cuthbert Morphy's body. He stooped and adjusted this. He rose and dimmed the lights by snapping off two of the switches and turning a bulb in its socket. He hesitated as he glanced at the telephone wires which Delaney had cut.

"Central will wonder what has happened," he said half aloud. "The connections leading to this house have given them a lot of trouble in the last few hours. I suppose they haven't another trouble-man like this one, though?" Drew pointed toward the shadowed rug which gleamed with silk and rare woven designs.

Loris raised her hand and grasped the portières. She shuddered slightly. She allowed her eyes to wander over the room as if for a last fleeting glance. They locked with the detective's own. She smiled with a plaintive droop to her mouth.

"I'll order the tea," she said invitingly. "Will you come in?"

Drew bowed and followed her through the portières. Delaney already stood by the door which led to the maid's room. Harry Nichols had picked up a small book and was impatiently examining its pages. The soldier turned and eyed the detective.

"We'll sit down?" he asked, laying the book on a cushion. "I'm a bit curious to know how you worked out a number of things. I think that Miss Stockbridge is, too."

"I'd like to be a detective!" exclaimed Loris, gliding across the room and tapping with her knuckles on the door. "Wouldn't you, Mr. Delaney?" she added naïvely.

Delaney chuckled. "I would, Miss," he said

with candor. "I'm not a regular. I'm only a volunteer. Mr. Drew has me along to do the heavy work. He says what I can't lift I can drag."

Loris smiled as the maid answered by opening the door to a crack. "Tea for four," she said. "Pekoe and tea biscuits—unless——"

She turned and widened her eyes prettily. "Would you have anything else?" she asked Drew.

"Strong tea!" exclaimed the detective. "I'll take 'hops,' as we call it. Make it very strong and then we'll settle some of these questions. My head is none too clear. I've been under a strain. I'm frank to admit that!"

The tea arrived within ten minutes. Drew had prevented Delaney from 'phoning for the coroner or to Fosdick. "Some matters to clear up," he whispered suggestively. "We'll leave this place with the case entirely completed."

Nichols arranged two chairs about a tiny teak-wood table. He had set this table within the bay of an alcove. The space was small, with Delaney's big feet very much in the way.

Drew poised his cup and glanced from Loris to Nichols. Their heads were very close together. The blue-black luster of the girl's hair was a perfect contrast to the officer's blond pompadour which was slightly disarranged.

The light from above haloed with the soft fire of frosted glass and cut prisms.

The detective upended the cup, drank deeply, then passed it over to Delaney. "Another, please," he said, watching the operative struggling with a saucer which was far too fragile for his thick fingers. "One more cup," he added. "No sugar."

Loris leaned from the cushion at the small of her back and glanced toward the portières with thought-laden eyes. "Poor misguided fellow," she said softly. "I feel uneasy, Mr. Drew. Somehow or other I feel that we were partly responsible for his death. I wish it hadn't happened."

"I'll agree with you. We must forget more than we remember in this world. Our time is short. The coroner and the Central Office squad will have to be notified. I don't doubt that Fosdick will be surprised at the turn in the case. He has some of your servants locked up, you know!"

Loris pressed closer to Nichols. "I wish that body wasn't in there," she whispered. "Suppose he had other confederates who would break in?"

"He worked alone," assured Drew, finishing the second cup and setting it down. "I found no evidence of another crook. He worked single-handed and single-minded. He made one

mistake. Morphy was a bungler. A bungler is a man who lets his artistic temperament get the better of him. Had he allowed Cuthbert to slay both the—Mr. Stockbridge and yourself over the 'phone, he would never have solved the case. It was the telephoning from Sing Sing that opened up the entire matter."

"The inevitable slip!" exclaimed Nichols.

"Yes," said Drew. "They all make it. I could tell you of a thousand instances. But back of the inevitable slip, as you call it, is something deeper. It has not often been mentioned in dealing with criminals."

"What is it?" asked Loris.

"Ego! Criminal ego! Most transgressors would go to the electric chair if the newspapers would write enough about them."

Loris raised her brows. "Is that the reason," she asked, "why Morphy telephoned before he killed poor father?"

"Exactly!" declared the detective. "Ego explains much that we call revenge. Now," he added, glancing about and at a tiny clock on a cabinet. "Now the questions from everybody! Make them short. Mr. Delaney and I will leave in ten minutes."

Nichols glanced at Loris. "You first," he said.

"I've just one or two, Mr. Drew," she said. "What are they?"

"Why did that poor dead man spare my life when he called me up the first time? He could have killed me then."

"I explained that. It wasn't *his* vendetta."

"Vendetta?"

"That is what this case is. An almost successful attempt to wipe out, or I should say obliterate, the Stockbridge Family—root and branch. Morphy had nursed the thing for over a year. He had soured up there in prison. His mind became abnormal. He conceived an abnormal revenge. Also a personal one. He had every reason to believe that he would never be discovered."

"Then, Mr. Drew, he would have called me up on the phone later and done what he did—to father? He would have told me who he was over the telephone, and—and——"

"Yes, Miss Stockbridge. Yes, be calm, though. He is beyond the pale now. You will never hear from him again. Be assured of that!"

Drew leaned in his chair and glanced at Delaney. The big operative fidgeted in his seat, squirmed, reached for the tea-pot, then drew back his hand and started drumming the table with his fingers.

Nichols disengaged his arm from behind Loris and squared his shoulders. He moved forward. "I'm going to ask a question for Miss

Stockbridge," he said. "Did you ever suspect her?"

"Never!" declared Drew.

"Or me?"

The detective hesitated before he answered. His smile cleared the air as he said. "Once—for about an hour. That was when I found out that you were partly German. I got over it, though."

"So did I," declared Nichols. "I got over the German part in no time. I enlisted!"

"That's a good answer! The best one I know!"

Delaney turned to his chief. He drew in his legs. "There's a question I'd like to ask," he said.

"What is it?"

"That magpie?"

Drew eyed Loris. "It's her bird now," he said. "She may not want it dragged back here again. I shouldn't think she would."

"I don't!" exclaimed Loris. "I wish that you would explain how you followed the clew, though. It talks so seldom, and then when it does talk it says such nonsense it's a perfect enigma."

"That bird," said Drew, "was the fine turning point of the case. Before it was brought into the office, downtown, I had no clew to start from. There was no indication to show from

whence the blow had fallen. Your father was slain for a motive. He was talking to Morphy when he died. Cuthbert had connected the two men."

"Through the two booths?" asked Loris.

"Yes. Through the booths at Grand Central. Their conversation was probably a brief one. Morphy undoubtedly gloated a minute or two, then told Mr. Stockbridge that his time had come on this earth. Naturally Mr. Stockbridge asked who was talking. Morphy answered by stating who he was, and also that he was at Sing Sing. Mr. Stockbridge repeated this statement aloud. He probably said, 'What, Sing Sing?' or 'Ah, Ossining!' or words to that effect. The bird heard it and remembered it."

"How strange!" exclaimed Nichols.

"Not at all," said Drew, leaning forward. "It was just like a magpie to pick out the one salient part of a conversation and repeat it. The couplet 'Sing Sing' was one it had never heard. It is so striking to even a bird. It probably came with such emphasis, there was no forgetting it!"

The group facing the detective was silent for a long minute. Delaney moved uneasily as Nichols toyed with his cup. Loris breathed in suppressed wonder at the tiny clew which had overthrown the best laid plans on the part of Morphy and his confederate. It was like an

echo of a dead voice coming back to confront a murderer. She shivered as she widened her eyes and stared at Drew.

"There's another question," she said. "How did the trouble-man get into this house in the first place, Mr. Drew?"

"I was responsible. He forced my hand!"

"How?"

"By a clever subterfuge. He disconnected the library telephone wires at the junction-box in the alley. He knew that sooner or later Mr. Stockbridge would try to use the 'phone. He couldn't get a connection, or I couldn't. It was the time I tried to 'phone and then notified Gramercy Hill Exchange through another 'phone. He was listening in and consequently caught the gist of my orders to Harrigan. He hurried to Gramercy Hill Exchange and there met Frisby, another trouble-man, starting out to investigate my complaint. He took Frisby's place, hurried over and closed the library connection and then came into the house, stating that we had sent for him."

"Clever," said Nichols. "That was clever, wasn't it?"

"Remarkably so!" exclaimed Drew. "It was a case of making the detective on the premises act as a tool. It was like a safeblower asking a night watchman to move a safe out on a truck. I never suspected that fellow at all. I hardly

looked at him when he was testing the connections in the library. I even heard him rattling a pair of pliers over the binding posts on the receiver. That was the time he took the old one off and put on the loaded pistol. It was done very quickly."

The detective paused and glanced at his watch. "We must go," he said, staring at Loris with soft interest. "I'm afraid we're keeping you from your sleep."

"No. I want to ask you another question," she said eagerly. "I'm still in doubt about the slot booths at Grand Central. Why were they used?"

"As a throw off! That is what the English would call shunting. Electricians use the same word. It means diverting a current or a connection. Cuthbert did this so that his trail would be harder to check up. He thought of almost everything."

"He missed his vocation!" interjected Nichols.

"And misused his talents," added Loris. "Think of being clever enough to do all of those things, and stoop to murder. He paid ten times over. He must have been under that man Morphy's power. So many men were. I heard father say that when Morphy was arrested. He said Morphy was the most dangerous man in

the world. That he would cause trouble sooner or later."

Drew rose and nodded. "He did that!" he exclaimed with conviction. "He came very close to getting away with it. But for the magpie and the fact that he 'phoned from the prison at the same time your father was murdered, there would have been no clew. Cuthbert would have entered this house after you were slain, and removed the receiver. That would have thrown the case into one of the unsolved mysteries. Electricity is a dangerous tool in the hands of clever crooks."

"It leaves no trace!" said Delaney, rising and standing by his chief. "It isn't made out of anything except little shakes in the wire or something like that."

Drew smiled good-naturedly. "It's a mystery to most people," he said, turning toward the windows and listening. "It's a bigger mystery to a woman than to a man," he added. "It's a good agent if properly used and kept within bounds. It brings back life as well as takes it. It creates and also destroys. No one knows what it is. All that we do know about it is its action on material substances—the power to transform mechanical energy into vibrations and then back again into mechanical energy."

"Like a voice on a wire?" asked Loris.

"Yes, Miss Stockbridge. The mechanical vibration of a diaphragm in a telephone transmitter is changed to electrical vibrations, passes along a wire and changes back to the same thing we had at the beginning. Cuthbert took advantage of this fact. All that was sent into the library was Morphy's voice on the wire. The wire left no trace. The voice actuated the diaphragm and at the same time the fine heating coil at the cap on the cartridge. The energy of the voice was sufficient to raise the temperature of the coil. This raise in temperature flashed some compound set in the wire. The flash started the fulminate of mercury in the cap. The cap exploded the smokeless powder. It was a series of steps each a little higher than the one below it."

"Was there any other way of doing the same thing?" Nichols inquired, as he rose lankily and stood over Loris.

"Yes!" declared Drew. "I can look back over what I found in the technical books about electricity and telephony and see several other ways for Cuthbert to accomplish the same result. The electrical pistol did not necessarily have to be actuated by the human voice."

"How terrible!" Loris whispered, with her brow puckering. "Perhaps others will use the same idea to slay their enemies."

"We'll keep it a close secret," the detective

said. "It rests with us four, now. Outside of us, there is only Morphy who knows."

"How else could the pistol be discharged?"

"Two other ways that I see, Miss Stockbridge. "It would be rather easy to arrange a little magnetic trigger in the receiver. This trigger could be actuated by an excess of current—say the connecting of a hundred and ten volt lighting circuit on the line. It might burn out the magnet wiring, but it would also release the trigger and fire the cartridge."

"That's like a door-catch?"

"Yes," said Drew. "Like a door-catch operated by a magnet or like the firing pin of a large cannon. They're not all operated by lanyards. Some work with push-buttons."

Nichols passed his hand over his brow. "I know another way," he said, glancing down at Loris. "There is a way which is far cleverer than Cuthbert thought of. It could be done by a tuning-fork or reed."

"Certainly!" exclaimed Drew. "I never thought of that. A reed attuned to a certain voice could be adapted to trip a trigger. Then the loaded receiver could be set so that one of your friends who had a peculiar voice, either high or low, would slay you. Rather terrifying revenge, that!"

"Beyond the pale!" said Nichols. "It's too bad this man Cuthbert didn't exercise one-tenth

of his genius in perfecting war inventions. He'd have helped us a lot."

Drew nodded and strode to the curtains at a side window. He peered out, rubbed the frosted panes, and pressed his nose against the glass.

"Stopped snowing!" he exclaimed, coming back and clasping Delaney's arm. "You hurry down-stairs and telephone Fosdick that we are waiting for him. Tell him to notify the coroner that there's a subject here which will interest him. We'll not explain everything to either the coroner or Fosdick. No one save us shall know the secret of the receiver."

"Delaney," said Nichols, as the big operative started through the portières. "Mr. Delaney."

"Yes!" boomed back through the room.

"Ask the Commissioner if he will release Miss Stockbridge's servants. It was an outrage."

"That's right!" exclaimed Drew, striding to the portières. "Tell him I said so, Delaney. Tell him just what you think. Give it to him strong! He bungled and he don't deserve a bit of sympathy."

"Mr. Drew?"

The detective wheeled on one heel and glanced back at Loris, who had risen and was standing with her arm linked within Nichols'. "Mr. Drew," she repeated with slow insistence, "won't you have another cup of tea before you go?"

"That I will, Miss Stockbridge. We three shall drink to the end of the case. Have you asked all the questions you want to? I want to forget this night as soon as possible. You were too close to death to suit me."

"I don't think of any more questions," said Loris, disengaging her arm and gliding across the room. "We'll get the tea. There is one matter. I want to pay you for your splendid services."

"Ah!" exclaimed Drew. "Ah, Miss Stockbridge, they were far from being splendid. I lost my reputation in the first instance. I should never have allowed your father to remain alone in the library. That was very short-sighted on my part."

"You couldn't think of everything."

"I underestimated the gravity of the situation."

"Perhaps father didn't explain how dangerous his enemies really were."

"No, I don't think it was that, exactly. I had been reading so many accounts of German spies that I connected this case with one of them. I took precautions against anything that a German might think of. I didn't figure on superbrains of the criminal order. Cuthbert Morphy had them!"

The maid appeared with the tray and hot water. Drew took the cup from Loris with a

bow. He allowed the tea to cool as he glanced at the two lovers. They had grown closer together over the time of the investigation. Nichols had that poise which is given to well-trained army men. He never said too much. This was a trait which pleased the detective immensely. It spoke volumes for Loris and her judgment in placing her trust in him.

"I actually hate to leave you people," Drew said, finishing the cup. "But I must be on my way."

Loris arched her dark brows. Her mouth parted into a soft smile. Her eyes glistened with moisture. "Harry is going, too," she said, glancing from Drew to Nichols. "He has to go! I'll sleep upstairs in mother's old room to-night. The maid can watch. Perhaps the butler will be back."

"He'll be back!" ejaculated the detective, adjusting his coat collar and stroking his mustache. "I'll see to that if I have to go over Fosdick's thick head. You can expect all of your servants within an hour."

Heavy footfalls on the rugs outside the suite announced Delaney. He came through the portières rubbing his hands in the manner of a man who was well-satisfied with his errand.

"I got them!" he boomed, glancing from Drew to Nichols and then letting his eyes shine on Loris. "I got Fosdick, first. I told him

what I thought of him, too. I don't like him. Never did! He said he'd be right up and see about things. He can see!" The big operative swung toward his chief.

"How about the coroner?" asked Drew.

"He's coming as fast as his hurry-up wagon will let him. I told him there was another—well, you know what I told him, Chief?"

The detective lifted his lowered brows. "Yes! Yes!" he said hastily, after a keen glance at Loris. "Yes. You did right. Now, get into the other room and gather up all of the tools and plaster-casts and every scrap of our own evidence. Put them in the trouble-man's satchel. Set the satchel outside the door to the hall. Then wait for me. I'll be but a minute."

Delaney paused. "There's one thing," he said in a half stammer—— "One thing, Chief, that's been troubling me while I was 'phoning to the coroner and to Fosdick."

"What is it?"

"If I can have that magpie? I'm going to give it to my wife—Mary—if I can. There's no bird in the house."

Drew turned toward Loris who had drawn Nichols to a window.

"Can he have it, Miss Stockbridge?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"Thanks," throated the operative, passing

through the portières with renewed energy. "Thanks," he added under his breath as he started picking up the plaster casts and tools. "That's how we caught 'Cutbert,' and I'll nurse the bird like a Grand Opera singer."

Loris glided from out the curtains and crossed the room. She stood a moment under a cone of soft light which reflected downward and brought out every detail of her gown and girlish figure. She turned and smiled widely at Drew who stood by the portières.

"I've almost forgotten something," she said, drawing out a chair and sitting down with a graceful sweep of her skirt. "I've forgotten that you are tired and that you have worked hard."

"Not at all," said Drew.

"Yes, you are tired and you have worked very hard. Harry will bear me out in that. He was just saying that you would make a good major of overseas forces. Why don't you join the army?"

Drew reached into his right hand trouser pocket. He brought his hand out with a small gold badge between his fingers. "I've already joined the army," he said. "This is a Secret Service badge. Don't you know that much work can be done over on this side? A burnt warehouse, for instance, is equal to a victory for the Kaiser. My agency is almost exclusively de-

voted to Government work. We never mention it, though."

"I see," said Loris, reaching into a pigeon-hole and drawing out a small yellow check-book. "I'm glad," she added, picking up a mother-of-pearl penholder and inspecting the pen-point. "I rather thought you would do your share. I think everybody should to the limit of their pocketbook and ability. Harry is."

Drew bowed slightly. "That's right, stick by Harry," he said to himself. "She's a sticker and then some," he added, frowning toward the check-book and the poised pen.

"Mr. Drew?"

The detective took one step in her direction. He waited then.

"Mr. Drew, how much money do I owe you? I'll pay you out of my account until the estate is settled."

The detective smiled broadly. "Nothing," he said, toying with his watch chain. "I don't think you owe me anything in this case."

"Oh, but I do!"

"I don't think so. Your father retained me. He was—was slain through my own carelessness. I think I owe you something."

"I can't let it remain that way." Loris turned and widened her eyes. A tiny pout sweetened her mouth. Nichols came across the rugs and stood by her side. He turned to Drew.

"That wouldn't be fair," he said. "You certainly earned your fee in this case. Why, you look five years older than when you came up into my rooms with that little pistol!"

Drew touched his mustache. He closed his lips. Fatigue swept over him as he said huskily:

"I've aged, yes. Well, I guess I have. The responsibility was more than I expected."

"How much?" asked Loris, opening the check-book.

Drew raised his eyes to the ceiling. A faint smile brightened his olive skin and brought out the fullness of his cheeks.

"Five thousand dollars," he said, without glancing at Loris.

She dipped the pen into the ink well, leaned her elbow on the leaf of the writing desk and hastily scratched a check with angular writing which had certainly been cultivated in a select boarding school. She turned, waved the check in the air, then rose and advanced toward the detective, who had not lowered his eyes.

"Thank you," she said, holding out the oblong of tinted paper. "I want to thank you."

Nichols stared at the detective. The soldier's eyes were like bayonets beneath a parapet. He had thought the figure rather high. Loris had no one to advise her save himself and the presence of Drew had tied his tongue.

"I want to thank you," repeated Loris.

Drew lowered his eyes and reached for the check. He glanced at it, started folding two edges, then smiled brightly as he crossed the room, picked up the mother-of-pearl penholder and dipped it into the ink.

"I'll endorse it," he said, flattening out the check with his palm. "I'll endorse it so that it can be transferred."

"To whom?" asked Loris.

"Why, to where it belongs. Do you think that I could take it? It's too much in the first place. In the second place I'm going to do my full bit from now on. What do you say, if we endorse this over to the American Red Cross? It'll buy beds and bandages and it'll help out all around!"

Loris lifted her eyes beneath her down dropping lashes. She smiled with tiny puckerings at the corners of her mouth. The glance was so archly sweet that Drew felt it was more than a reward. He caught her mood and hastily dashed off his signature across the back of the check.

"You present it to them," he said. "Take it with my compliments to the treasurer of your own division. I'll venture they will not question the signature."

Nichols' hand crept out. It clasped over Drew's fingers in a soldier's grip. The two

men faced each other. Drew reached up his left arm and patted the captain on the shoulder. "Two bars," he said. "I hope to see stars there," he added sincerely. "Stars, when you come back from the conquest of Berlin."

"They'll be there!" declared Loris with flashing eyes. "Harry will get them!"

Delaney peered through the portières despite his instructions to the contrary.

"All set, Chief," he said. "I hear Fosdick downstairs."

"Coming," said Drew, as he turned away from Loris and Nichols.

The two detectives paused in the center of the room. The mound under the splendid rug held their eyes for a fleeting moment. The ends of the telephone wires lay across the hard-wood floor. They glanced at these.

"No trace!" said Drew. "We needn't tell Fosdick much. Come on!"

Delaney held out the detective's coat and hat. Drew thrust his arms into his silk-lined sleeves, pulled the hat down over his eyes and swung as the big operative turned his shoulder.

"Look," whispered Delaney.

Loris Stockbridge and her lover stood under the glow from the soft clusters of the inner room of the suite. The captain held his peaked cap in his right hand. He also was departing.

"Turtle-doves," Delaney breathed with almost pride.

"Ah!" said Drew. "Ah, my friend, you must remember that we were once that way ourselves. But now—but now, Delaney—there is a thing which is sweeter than love's young dream. It is a tired man's sleep. I think I have earned mine to-night!"

THE END

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